

Closure in Biblical Narrative

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Closure in Biblical Narrative

By
Susan Zeelander



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PREFACE

Interest in endings and closure is evident from as early as the days of our ancient writings. The Book of Isaiah describes the distant and final uplifting transformation of our lives “in the days to come.” The Book of Revelation concludes with an invitation to the faithful to participate in redemption and salvation. Their authors assumed that there was a linear progression in time and that over time change occurs, leading to closure of life as we know it.

The on-going quest for an understanding of the ends of things extends to the spectator at a bicycle race who wants to know who won and perhaps how he did it. The reader of a whodunit wants to know, in fact, who actually did it. As we reach old age the question of endings and closure is raised more insistently. We know we will die, but other issues, like the how of it and the what of it—What ongoing issues can be resolved? Can one look back and see a wholeness?—become more important.

In literature, as in life and in bicycle races, there has been great interest in how things end. Aristotle’s famous dictum, expressed in the fourth century BCE, extended this notion of the ends of things to literature: for a plot to be whole it is to have “a beginning, a middle, and an end.” Over the last forty years, sparked by books by Barbara Herrnstein Smith (*Poetic Closure: How Poems End*) and Frank Kermode (*The Sense of an Ending*), there has been an interest in literary endings and, most importantly, in how they bring satisfaction to readers who might otherwise be reluctant to accept that a poem, or a book, or a film, or a short story is ending where it does. For the Hebrew Bible, although there has been much discussion of its literary aspects, until now there has been no comprehensive discussion of how the narratives end.

This is a study of how biblical narratives end. It focuses on thirty-eight relatively short narratives in the Book of Genesis and demonstrates that biblical authors and editors ended their narratives with forms and devices that would provide satisfaction or diversion and would alert a reader that the end was at hand. To do this they used multiple and sometimes unexpected forms of closure including rituals, etiologies, frames and summaries, specific language and motifs, and repetitions that marked the changes in their stories. Together these can be considered closural conventions. Some of the conventions found in the stories appear in other literary genres, but

in the Hebrew Bible they are particularly significant. Moreover, they are effective because they relate to how our minds structure experiences, to readers' experiences in life and with other biblical narratives, and to values expressed throughout Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch.

This study takes into account the vast literature of the last 200 years that posits that there were multiple sources for the stories in Genesis and the other books of the Hebrew Bible. It demonstrates that narratives from different sources sometimes used different closural conventions, which were consistent with the issues of that source. Narratives that have multiple sources sometimes include the closural forms from each of their sources. These component elements are examined in this study. This work fills a gap in the principles of composition, or narrative poetics, of the Hebrew Bible and makes narrative poetics more relevant to historical criticism.

* * * * *

Closure in Biblical Narrative is based on the doctoral dissertation I completed at the University of Pennsylvania in 2010, under the guidance of Jeffrey H. Tigay. As his student, I benefitted greatly from his integrity as a person and a scholar, as well as from his wisdom, knowledge, and patience as a teacher and mentor. My subsequent appointment as a visiting scholar in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Penn has enabled me to do further research and introduce refinements to the original study, which are reflected in this book.

The two members of my dissertation committee, in addition to Jeff Tigay, were David M. Stern, who was generous in sharing his knowledge especially in the area of literary theory, and Dan Ben-Amos, who was very helpful in the field of folklore. At Penn, over the years, I was able to study with Barry Eichler and Edward Breuer, with visiting professors Gary Rendsburg, Mark S. Smith, and Adele Berlin, and briefly with Moshe Greenberg, ז"ל, and Judah Goldin, ז"ל. Other scholars have been generous as this work progressed. Gerald J. Prince at Penn suggested that I look at the work of Emma Kafalenos within narratology; I went to him often to clarify literary points. Bernard M. Levinson of the University of Minnesota suggested the works of Barbara Herrnstein Smith and Frank Kermode. Deborah H. Roberts of Haverford College introduced me to studies of endings and ritual in classical Latin and Greek literature. Herman (Chaim) L. Horowitz suggested readings in contextual psychology that related to ritual. In earlier years at Gratz College I benefitted from the scholarly teaching of Abraham Marthan, Nahum Waldman, ז"ל, Baruch Schwartz of Hebrew University, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, ז"ל.

My student colleagues and friends at Penn include Andrea Weiss (who first suggested the topic of closure), Susan Marks, Rachel Anisfeld, Shawn Zelig Aster, Shalom Holtz, Yehudah Kraut, Nili Fox, Stephen Kim, and Spencer Allen. All are bright and generous and successfully launched in their academic careers. Peggy Guinan, Assistant to the Chair of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, and Linda Greene and Diane Moderski were helpful, professional, and fun to work with. My dear friend Evelyn Grossberg provided professional editorial help with this manuscript.

With gratitude, I would like to express my appreciation to the members of my family. My parents, Jean E. and Elliott Haness, *z"l*, gave me their love and instilled confidence in me; they transmitted the love of text and learning that my grandparents Henry and Sheindel Elbaum, *z"l*, carried with them to this country. Years later I can see these and other wonderful qualities in my children and grandchildren, Maureen and Jeff, Zach and Josh; Lisa and Elliot, Zoe and Jacob; Julie and Erik Lederman, Bella and Oliver. I am proud of each of them and learn from them all, from the biggest to the littlest.

And to Norbert, my friend and love for over 50 years, we're blessed.

NOTES ON TRANSLATION, TRANSLITERATION, AND DOCUMENTARY SOURCE ATTRIBUTIONS

All translations of the Bible, unless noted, are from the JPS *Tanakh*. Occasionally I use my own translations or that of others when I would like the reader to focus on the structure or specific linguistic elements of a passage.

Transliterations of the Hebrew consonants into English characters usually follow the quoted English translation. The following transliteration key is used:

א = '	מ = m
ב = b	נ = n
ג = g	ס = ś
ד = d	ע = '
ה = h	פ = p
ו = w	צ = ṣ
ז = z	ק = q
ח = ḥ	ר = r
ט = ṭ	ש = s
י = y	ש = š
כ = k	ת = t
ל = l	

For the documentary sources of the Tanakh, I follow the guidelines of Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible With Sources Revealed*. On the occasions that other scholars disagree with Friedman's source designation and it is germane to the discussion, I note that in the text or footnotes.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Introduction*

The key events in the story of Cain and Abel are well known.¹ Cain murders his brother. He denies it and is condemned by God. As the story ends God punishes Cain by sending him away from his home to wander the earth protected by a mark from God, and then Cain settles in the land of Nod, east of Eden. The last few points made in the story, that is, the punishment for the murder, Cain's departure and settling in Nod, and the author's explanation of where Nod is located, are closural devices. These and other similar forms and devices are found over and over again in the stories in Genesis and are evidence of the presence of closural conventions in these narratives.

Biblical writers and editors used a large number of these forms as a strategy for ending their narratives. They prepared their readers for the end moment even if readers would have liked the story to continue or wished to learn more about the circumstances or the characters or wanted to be further entertained or educated. In the Cain and Abel story, for example, one could wonder what kind of place Nod was or what kind of work Cain did there. But the narrative doesn't tell us. Instead the writer, by using structural, thematic, and linguistic devices to mark the end, created a sense that it was reasonable for the narrative to end where it did. In this way the writer signaled that the story was over.

Closural conventions are found in all the short narratives in Gen 1–35 and 38. Cain's punishment reflects a basic device found among the conventions, the resolution of an unsettling event or perception that precipitated the action of the story. Some of the devices, like the point that Cain has settled in a far-away place, contribute to the sense that the end is final and relatively stable. Other devices and forms underscore points or values that the writers wished to emphasize as the story is ending. The process of cause and effect in the Cain and Abel story—that Cain's action precipitated

¹ Gen 4:1–16.

God's response and God's response precipitated Cain's departure—contributes to the sense that in the Genesis stories the world is an orderly place, even when events occur that destabilize the circumstances. Some closural forms are formulaic indicators of the end of a story; most are artistically crafted, their details unique to their story. Sometimes they provide pleasure by entertaining or by educating readers as the story closes. Some devices reflect back into their narratives and sharpen the sense that the narrative is a unit; they may reach forward into the future to connect the narrative to ongoing issues in other Genesis stories.

Occasionally an ending device may *destabilize* an ending, raising the question of why the writer or editor has chosen to end his story with elements that leave issues unresolved or unclear. As each of the Genesis narratives comes to an end, readers are given the opportunity to pause and reflect on what has occurred. This idea, that an ending is directed to readers so they can have the opportunity to think about what has occurred or how words and events have been presented, is an ancient concept, first suggested by rabbinic interpreters of the Bible.² It has also been observed by contemporary scholars studying non-biblical literary genres.³

Within the Bible the concept of narrative is presented as a tradition of storytelling. In the Book of Judges, Gideon complains to God about Midianite marauders in the land; he quotes "our fathers [who] told us" about

² In the *Sifra*, the halakhic midrash to the Book of Leviticus, the rabbis suggest a purpose for [separate] sections in the text (they are referring to markers or spaces that separate *parashiot*). The purpose is to give the reader the "space" (*rwwh*) to reflect on the section that has been read or on a subject. This rabbinic insight comes in response to the larger question of why the two words, "he called" and "he said," are used when one verb might have sufficed in various places in the Torah. Among the answers that are given, numbers 8 and 9 are pertinent for the point above. They discuss Lev 11, "The Lord *called* to Moses and *spoke* to him from the tent of meeting, saying."

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהֵי מִשְׁכָּה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:

In their commentary to this text, the rabbis note that the original Torah was given to Moses without sections [separators]. They suggest that in order to give Moses space to reflect between one *parasha* and the next, and between one subject and the next, God used those two separate words, "he called" and "he spoke," when he spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting. Now if Moses, who had heard the words directly from the Lord, needed the pauses, the rabbis continue, how much more so do "the rest of us" (הַיְדִיּוֹט מִהֵידִיּוֹט).

³ Among modern scholars of non-biblical literature, this effect on readers has been noted by Barbara Herrnstein Smith specifically for the ends of poems and by Marianna Torgovnick for the ends of novels. Smith, in *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, introduced the term "retrospective patterning" and uses it throughout. Marianna Torgovnick, in *Closure in the Novel*, 6–7 and 209, explains that "closures reveal the essences of novels with particular clarity."

God's "wondrous deeds" when he "brought us up from Egypt."⁴ Gideon does not explain how biblical storytellers or writers *ended* their narratives, yet it is likely that strategies for ending a narrative, even if not consciously used, were in place as well.

In the following pages, I explore the need for a study of biblical narrative endings and explain the benefit of focusing on the short narratives in Genesis. I examine the Cain and Abel story a little more closely, point out other closural devices in this narrative, and show how these also contribute to closure. I highlight one closural device—a ritual at the end of the story—that does *not* appear in the Cain and Abel story but is common in many of these narratives. I also introduce some key contributions of scholars whose work has contributed to this study. The narratives that I examine closely are listed in an appendix at the end of this chapter.⁵

1.2. *The Narrative Endings*

Although there has been much research on the narrative aspects of the Bible in recent years, there has been no study of the ends of narratives and how specific devices contribute to closure. The present work provides a new vantage point from which to analyze the stories and leads to additional insights into individual narratives. This study also reveals categories of ending devices that have not been examined, or even noted, before. I look at the ubiquity of rituals and etiologies and, to a lesser extent, proverbs, at the ends of narratives. The ways in which these function in the narratives and an examination of why they may have been chosen to end the stories provide new insights into biblical writers' and editors' strategies and the closural conventions they used.

Closural forms have their primary effect, of course, on their individual narratives. But knowledge of these in the aggregate and knowledge of how they were used provide insight into the broader issue of what the biblical writers considered an appropriate way to end a narrative. The methods I use allow the "end-sections" of each narrative to be clearly defined so that the closural devices occurring in those end-sections can be examined and compared. The concepts of 'closure' and 'anti-closure,' which have been applied to other genres, provide a lens through which to view these stories.

⁴ Judg 6:13.

⁵ In addition, Index I lists all narratives and ancient texts cited.

1.3. *Narratives in the Study*

This study is based on thirty-eight short narratives in Genesis.⁶ This group of stories was chosen because most of them have highly developed literary qualities, because they provide a rich trove of literary, structural, and thematic devices, and because they are found within a single book of the Bible. Their final editing reflects a common end-point in time. The stories are also independent of one another, in that each has an identifiable beginning, middle, and end, which can be ascertained using the tools of narratology.⁷ Most are focused on one event, although they often share characters, themes, linguistic details, and even situations with other stories. Occasionally, a short narrative is embedded within a longer one. This study does not include the lengthy and more complex narratives in the Book of Genesis, specifically the Joseph novella and the stories of Jacob in Haran. The subsidiary and subordinate plots of those narratives require individual studies to deal with their complexities and that would complicate an important aspect of this work—the ability to provide a profile of narrative endings.

Many of the stories are quite brief, merely ten or twenty verses long, yet even the briefest has various closural devices. These two literary phenomena, the brevity of the narratives and the presence of multiple closural devices, in fact, may explain the impact of these devices on readers: because the stories are so short, readers can remember the whole of a narrative as it is ending and observe nuanced changes or repetitions or other linguistic closural devices and relate them to earlier verses in the story.⁸

1.4. *Closural Devices in the Cain and Abel Story*

A few of the closural signals that mark the end of the Cain and Abel story were noted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. This more detailed retelling brings additional closural devices into focus. As I relate the story

⁶ See the list in the appendix to this chapter.

⁷ Occasionally scholars disagree about the precise beginning or ending verse or half-verse. The problem related to the half-verse Gen 2:4a, for example, is discussed in Chapter 2.

⁸ The connection between the brevity of the short story and the reader's ability to match beginning and end was noted by John Gerlach, "Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story," 160. Gerlach's contribution to the study of short narratives, some of it drawn from the theories of Edgar Allen Poe, is discussed later in this chapter.

I also delineate the end, or more precisely, the “end-section” of the narrative where these devices are located, by identifying the steps in the plot as it moves from beginning to end.

In the initial circumstances of the story, Cain and Abel are born to Adam and Eve; in time, Cain becomes a farmer and Abel a shepherd and the two brothers make offerings to God. When God does not “pay heed” to Cain’s offering, Cain is very upset. He kills Abel (Gen 4:8). Cain’s deed unsettles the circumstances in the family and the land and precipitates the ensuing actions. God comes to Cain, asking him where his brother is. Cain famously replies, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9). God responds by cursing Cain (or God bans him from the ground that received Abel’s blood, or the curse from the Lord rises up from the ground that took his brother’s blood).⁹ God announces his decision to requite the murder: he states that the ground will no longer yield its strength to Cain and Cain will be forced to leave the presence of God and wander the earth. Cain protests that the punishment is too great; he could be killed by anyone who finds him as he wanders (verses 13–14). In response, God places a protective mark on him. Cain can now leave and he does. In verses 15–16 Cain departs and the land is rid of Cain the murderer. In the last half-verse the reader is told “and [Cain] settled in Nod, east of Eden.”

Is that half-verse “the end”? Or is the end more than that? We can answer by identifying the point in the plot where the unsettled situation in the story is re-stabilized.¹⁰ That occurs when God accedes to Cain’s request and Cain leaves. But the story, and the end-section, continues on a bit. We learn that Cain has settled down somewhere else. Thus, the “end-section” includes the transformation, that is, the point at which the

⁹ The Hebrew in Gen 4:11a is ambiguous and has been understood differently in medieval and contemporary Bible commentaries. As Nahum Sarna explains in *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 355, the JPS translation follows the rendering of Ramban: “Therefore you shall be more ‘cursed (‘*arur*’) than the ground.” Sarna notes the alternative understandings of Ibn Ezra and Radak. E. A. Speiser’s translation in *Genesis* follows the Ibn Ezra rendering, which deprives Cain of access to the ground as a tiller of the soil: “Hence you are banned from the soil which forced open its mouth to take your brother’s blood from your hand.” Robert Alter’s translation in *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* follows Radak, which sees the curse rising up from the ground to affect Cain: “And so, cursed shall you be by the soil that gaped its mouth to take your brother’s blood from your hand.”

¹⁰ More detailed discussions of terms such as “re-stabilization of the narrative,” “transformation,” and the methodologies I use can be found in Chapter 2.

situation is re-stabilized, and any additional information that the writer includes after that (Gen 4:13–16).

Within the end-section there are many closural devices, and I use literary methods to identify them: a combination of close reading, which focuses upon all details and qualities of language and form in the unit under study, plus an awareness of the interconnections between this and other Genesis stories regarding characters, situations, language, and moral and theological vision.¹¹

Earlier I noted the closural function of the punishment (it resolves the destabilized situation) and also that Cain departed and “settled,” the latter a word that suggests stopping. When the writer adds the explanation of where Nod is located he suggests that it is a “real” place, lending verisimilitude to the story. The word Nod is also an entertaining linguistic flourish that emphasizes the theme of punishment in the story. Its Hebrew root is cognate to the verb “to wander” (*n.d.d*), the opposite of being settled in a place. For Cain the place-name is an ongoing reminder of God’s punishment. For the reader, it is an entertaining pun.

Various other linguistic changes or flourishes in the end-section contribute to the finality, stability, or integrity of the story. The author modifies the key word “to kill” (*h.r.g*) so as to emphasize an important development in the story. Early in the narrative the verb “to kill” marks the destabilization (“Cain set upon his brother Abel and *killed* him”; Gen 4:8). In the end-section the verb is used twice in phrases that refer to *preventing* more killing.¹² After he has placed a mark on Cain God says, “I promise, if anyone *kills* Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him” (Gen 4:15a). This changed use of the verb is then repeated: “And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should *kill* him” (Gen 4:15b).

Other linguistic devices signal the end. The use of the word *lakhen* (“I promise” or “upon my word”) adds solemnity and finality in the end-section: God’s last declaration to Cain begins with *lakhen* (Gen 4:15). In this and in other narratives, *lakhen* concludes and finalizes a statement

¹¹ My literary approach is greatly influenced by that of Robert Alter, which he explores in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* and in his chapter “Introduction to the Old Testament” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, 11–35.

¹² Gen 4:15a, “The Lord said to him [Cain], ‘I promise, if anyone *kills* Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him.’” Gen 4:15b, “And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should *kill* him.”

in an end-section or at the end of a scene.¹³ Another device, hyperbole, is used as God declares *sevenfold* vengeance if someone should kill Cain. Hyperbole suggests an over-the-top assurance and absoluteness and has similar effects when it marks the end in other narratives. In Gen 22:17, for example, God promises Abraham descendants “as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore.”

The writer demonstrates the integrity of this story by showing that the end is thematically consistent with the previously expressed authority system and its values. God’s action enforces the moral order by punishing and banishing Cain. This ending motif can be seen in the end-section of the prior narrative when God punishes and banishes Adam and Eve (Gen 3).

A didactic point made in the end-section is that God is omnipotent but accedes to the protests of the individual. In a later narrative, Gen 18, God again listens to an individual, but there the outcome is different. God listens to Abraham’s argument to spare the people of Sodom and Gomorrah if ten innocent people can be found there (Gen 18:16–33). But in that end-section, God decides that a sufficient number of innocents cannot be found, and he does not accede to Abraham’s request.

Finally, in the end-section of the Cain and Abel story the writer uses two formulaic motifs of ending noted earlier, departure and settling down. Both motifs use verbs that are common signals that a story is over. Thus, “Cain *left* (y.š.) the presence of the Lord and *settled* (y.š.b) in the land of Nod, east of Eden.” With these words the narrator follows the departure to a distant but barely visible location.

Some of the literary devices noted above, such as the verbs “to leave” and “to settle,” the pun “Nod,” and the reworking of a word like “to kill,” are not inherently closural. Yet I have identified them as closural in their contexts in the end-section of this narrative. In the course of this study I demonstrate that otherwise ordinary words and devices take on closural functions when they occur in end-sections if at the same time they support key changes in their stories. The regularity with which this occurs

¹³ These include Gen 30:15, Num 20:12, and Num 25:12. See Chapter 4, n. 26, for a discussion of the meaning of *lakhen* and *’akhen* by Frederic J. Goldbaum, “Two Hebrew Quasi-Adverbs: לָכֵן and אָכֵן,” *JNES* 23, no. 2: 132–135.

suggests that an ancient reader could have been aware of these closural functions.¹⁴

This brief analysis of closural conventions at the end of the Cain and Abel story indicates that biblical writers used many types of closural forms and devices, and they used many of them in the same story. One can now raise the question, Did they use these conventions consciously, or, intuitively?¹⁵ That is very difficult to determine. However, we can see that the writers created a sense that their stories were over, even for readers who may not have noticed each ending device. The many closural elements cumulatively brought about a sense that each story was resolved, was stable, and had integrity.

1.5. *The Phenomenon of Ritual as a Closing Device*

In a great number of the narratives in Genesis—in eighteen of the thirty-eight in this study—there is a ritual in the end-section. That is a phenomenon that has not been commented on in the past. The ritual activities include offering sacrifices; building an altar or pillar; calling upon the name of God; life-cycle rituals such as circumcision, marriage, and burial; and activities related to establishing a covenant between individuals. In their occurrences in the narratives, the rituals are most often described very briefly, but their presence contributes to closure on the level of the participant and on the level of the reader.

A well-known ritual occurs at the end of the Flood story, after the land has dried and Noah disembarks from the ark. He builds “an altar to the Lord [and offers] burnt offerings on the altar.” Then God smells its “pleasing odor.” God’s words at that moment are transformative—the earth will never again be “doomed . . . because of man.” There is a new equilibrium in the world, one that is satisfying to Noah and to the reader. The ritual ending provides stability, a closural device in narratives, because it presumes that God’s power can bring about permanence. It also demonstrates integrity by the way that the narrator depicts God’s use of his power: here as

¹⁴ Aharon Mirsky, “Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew,” in *Semitics* 5 (1977), 14, has found that “changing the pattern in the last unit is a stylistic device for indicating conclusion” in various psalms and in prophecy, the Book of Numbers, the Talmud, and *Pirkei Avot*. His example regarding Gen 23 is discussed in Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Robert Alter raises this question and does not answer it, but speaks of the many “artful determinations” he has found in the biblical text. See *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, 21.

elsewhere in Genesis, God will respond to the petition of an individual and he uses that power for the benefit of mankind. There are various other closural devices at this point in the story as well, including thematic and linguistic frames that create a sense of wholeness to a unit that began in Gen 6:5–9.¹⁶ I leave the discussion of ritual endings, their roles, and effects to Chapter 6 because ritual endings are often complex, in that they are comprised of many elements that should be explored first.

1.6. *Popular and Academic Interest in “Closure”*

Closure “combines issues of small-scale detail about the workings of texts with some of the largest questions about the boundaries and transgressions of our lives.”¹⁷

In the late 1960s, Frank Kermode published *The Sense of an Ending*,¹⁸ which focused on our psychological and metaphysical needs as human beings to make coherent patterns of our lives. He showed that as individuals we try hard to make those life patterns consonant with the structures that we have established in religion and in history, and we take stock of our lives by using naturally occurring terminal points as well as arbitrary chronological divisions in time. At around the same time that Kermode published his book, Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* examined the ‘small-scale detail’ of the endings of poems, again relating them to large questions of life. She explored the “dread and satisfaction” that one feels at the end of something.¹⁹ Her book provides a pragmatic demonstration of the literary, structural, and thematic elements that contribute to readers’ satisfaction upon coming to the end of a poem. By satisfaction, Smith includes a range of responses felt by a reader: the gratification that comes after (some of the) expectations raised by the poem are fulfilled; the release of tension that comes about after

¹⁶ In Chapter 3 the closural effects of a frame are discussed in more detail.

¹⁷ Don Fowler, *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin*, 237. Fowler’s quote is part of an introduction to two of the essays that deal with closure in his book. I am indebted to Deborah H. Roberts for introducing me to the scholarship of closure in classical Greek and Latin texts.

¹⁸ *The Sense of an Ending* by Frank Kermode was published in 1967. Kermode discusses how literature responds to contemporary skepticism that no longer accepts the “old paradigms” of beginnings, middles, and ends (whether in literature or science or religion), but instead thinks in terms of ongoing crises (28–31).

¹⁹ Barbara Herrnstein Smith published *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* in 1968; the quotes are from pages 3–4.

experiencing the poem as it is read or heard; and the confirmation at the end of the value of the entire experience.

Since the publication of these two books, endings (and beginnings) have been investigated on various levels and for many genres.²⁰ Academic studies have examined endings and closure in the novel, the epistolary novel, the short story, classical and modern drama, and classic epic. The ending's relationship to earlier parts of the text and the ending's ability to satisfy readers in the ways that Smith observed, that is, by meeting their expectations, by releasing the tensions of issues raised in the text, and by confirming the value of the experience, have all been areas of study. I present some of these findings in the next section.

Surprisingly, there has been no comparable study of endings of biblical narrative. In fact, Marc Brettler observed in 2002 that "there is a tremendous need to write the equivalent of Smith's *Poetic Closure* for biblical studies."²¹ This is especially surprising because for the past few decades there has been so much attention focused on literary study of the Bible that one would have expected the study of endings to make its way into the research, and yet it has not.

1.7. *Relevant Literary Studies*

Studies of the endings of various genres of non-biblical literature have been helpful for the present work. One can learn from them and apply some of their insights to biblical narrative. Aristotle, in his discussion of tragedy in his *Poetics*, first expressed the importance of understanding the end in order to understand the whole literary unit. He noted that a well-constructed plot of a tragedy should not be ended 'casually' but rather be a constructive part of the 'whole.'²² In this regard, Aristotle was focusing on the effect of the end as one looks back upon the whole of the plot. Centuries later, Marianna Torgovnick describes a similar function for the end of novels. "Endings . . . set into motion the process of retrospective rather than

²⁰ Regarding the beginnings of literary units, Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, xii, contrasts the term "beginnings" with the mythologically based term "origins." He argues that the patterns that we live by are "secular, humanly produced, and ceaselessly re-examined." See also Michael Carasik, "Three Biblical Beginnings," 1–22, in Cohen and Magid, *Beginnings/Again: Towards a Hermeneutics of Jewish Texts*.

²¹ Marc Brettler, *The Book of Judges*, 118, n. 9. I thank Andrea L. Weiss for bringing this to my attention and for her generous suggestion of this topic.

²² Aristotle, *Poetics*, Hammond Edition, 20.

speculative thinking," which is necessary to discern what has occurred as well as its themes and patterns.²³ Gerald Prince succinctly explains, "What comes after often illuminates what comes before."²⁴ Recent studies have built upon this concept, including those of narrative by Gerard Genette and Ann Jefferson and specialized studies of classical Greek literature by Deborah H. Roberts and others.²⁵

The 1968 study by Smith I referred to earlier seems to have been the catalyst for studies of endings and closure in other genres. In *Poetic Closure*, she demonstrated the relationship between the structure of a poem, a reader's perception of that structure and its modifications, and the poem's ability to provide satisfaction to the reader when it fails to continue.²⁶ In 'structure' she included both thematic and formal elements, such as rhyme and alliteration, and she catalogued tens of literary techniques that bring closure to poems. She noted, for example, that while factors in a poem such as meter or language repetitions do not by themselves lead to closure, modifications in these factors lead to a sense of finality.²⁷

The discussion of language modifications in the Cain and Abel story discussed above draws from Smith's findings. I noted that the key word "to kill" (*h.r.g*) becomes, in the end-section, part of two phrases that refer to *preventing* more killing. This corresponds to changes that occur in the narrative; it was demonstrated that killing is bad—it causes the individual who does it to be cursed, or banned, by God, and it shows that God himself will act to prevent an individual from being killed (as he does by putting a mark on Cain). The linguistic modification reflects and supports the thematic development, "preparing the reader for the conclusion of

²³ Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, 5, explains that she borrowed the term "retrospective patterning" from B. H. Smith.

²⁴ Gerald Prince, *Narratology*, 156–57, gives this example: "Thus, should a narrative be used to account for the occurrence of *x* at time *t*, its beginning—chronologically speaking—will be related to *x*."

²⁵ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*; also Ann Jefferson, "Mise en abyme and the Prophetic in Narrative," 196. In Greek tragedy the end has the authority to interpret what has come before. Deborah H. Roberts demonstrates this in "Beginnings and Endings," 137, 142–148. Studies of the ends of biblical stories have been relatively sparse, but the role of the end in emphasizing an ideological position at the end of a book of the Bible is demonstrated by Jeffrey H. Tigay in "The Significance of the End of Deuteronomy." The last verses of Deuteronomy, 34:10–12, remind the reader of the authority of Moses as the supreme prophet of YHWH.

²⁶ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 1–32, and throughout.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 50–56. Smith demonstrates how modifications in the language of sonnets lead to closure.

the narrative and supporting its finality.”²⁸ Thus the key word has become clausal.

Other points that Smith made were also demonstrated in my discussion of the Cain and Abel narrative. I noted, for example, that God declares a hyperbolic “sevenfold” vengeance and that he uses the authoritative *lakhen* (“I promise” or “upon my word”). Smith demonstrates the contribution of hyperbole and a tone of authority to satisfactory endings of poems.²⁹ Smith also shows how linguistic allusions in poetry relate to the concepts of ending, finishing, rest, and termination. Similarly, Cain rests (resides) in Nod at the end of that story (Gen 4:15).³⁰ This suggests stability, which in turn contributes to closure.

Studies of the ends of novels have value for the present work, even though novels as a genre are much longer. It has been shown that in novels (and in narratives that occur in conversations)³¹ the story often continues beyond the conclusion of key events, which is different from short stories and novellas, which tend to “end as soon as the main conflict is over . . . Novels tend to ramble and often end arbitrarily.”³²

Torgovnick’s study of the end sections of nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels indicates that when the author continues to write after the main conflict is resolved, that place in the novel is “where an author most pressingly desires to make his points.” Those points can be “aesthetic, moral, social, political, epistemological, or even the determination not to make any point at all.”³³ A sub-genre of the novel that is even more rhetorically oriented has been identified by David Richter.³⁴ In this type of novel the author is focused on a design or purpose that he wishes to convey. He presents values “great or small, such as the world had not previously known” (or that the writer assumes that the world “had not previously known”). The design or purpose is realized at the end of those

²⁸ Ibid., 59–60. Smith uses these words in her discussion of the evolution of early English poetry. She points out that as English poetry lessened its dependence on music, even slight changes in thematic material served to indicate the end.

²⁹ Ibid., 185 and 157.

³⁰ Ibid., 126.

³¹ William Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, 365–366.

³² Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, 84. In the following chapters, I present more detailed discussion of how the end-sections are used by their biblical authors.

³³ Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, 19.

³⁴ David Richter, *Fable’s End—Completeness and Closure in Rhetorical Fiction*, vii, 181. Some examples of rhetorical fiction that Richter discusses are *Catch-22*, *Animal Farm*, and *Cry the Beloved Country*.

works. Richter explains that in those novels the protagonists exhibit “the sense of a completed process of change, either in external circumstances or in internal consciousness.”³⁵

Many of the short biblical narratives in this study ‘behave’ like novels. They continue past the resolution of the main conflict and exhibit the author’s didactic intent. As I noted above, in the Cain and Abel narrative the key destabilizing event of the narrative is the killing of Abel. When Cain departs a new equilibrium is established, one in which the land is cleansed of its curse and Cain the murderer is removed from it. Yet the information brought forth at the very end—that Cain settled in the land of Nod (Gen 4:16b)—tells readers that Cain survived his ordeal of wandering helped by God’s protective mark. In other biblical narratives several verses may add information after the narrative has been “resolved,” that is, after the destabilized situation has been re-stabilized. As one example, at the end of Gen 21:1–21, information about the later years of the young Ishmael, son of Abraham, fills verses 20 and 21.

Not surprisingly, the Genesis narratives share characteristics with the short story genre—most obviously its brevity and, in addition, a focus on a single goal that structures the work. In John Gerlach’s study of the short story, which draws from the theories of Edgar Allan Poe, he discusses the short story’s “fundamental dependence on an endpoint.”³⁶ A comparable characteristic of these short Genesis narratives is that they revolve around the resolution of a single issue, and once the resolution and its transformation take place, the story is essentially over. Gerlach explains the effect of a story’s brevity on the reader:

When Poe realized, both in practice and theory, that the writer’s anticipation of an ending could shape the rest of the story, he had perceived something only partly realized in the efforts of short-story writers before him. He had sensed the hypnotic effect that a short narrative, *read in between ten minutes to an hour* might exert if latent with the sense of ultimate approach. The short story was long enough to sustain this mounting intensity, which only *the immanence of a goal* could create, but it was not so long that natural and social needs would invariably break the spell; he realized that the effort of a memory required to match the beginning and end, at least at a subconscious level, was within the reader’s range (*italics added*).³⁷

³⁵ Ibid., 181.

³⁶ John Gerlach, *Toward the End*, 161.

³⁷ Ibid., 160. Poe’s theories are presented in his review of “Twice-Told Tales,” the short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne, whom he greatly admired.

What Gerlach was noting for modern short stories—their brevity, their focus on a goal, and the assumption that the reader would be able to match the beginning and the end—has value for understanding these Genesis stories.³⁸ This focus was noted by Erich Auerbach, who compared Homer's *Odyssey* with biblical narratives, where “the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized; what lies between is nonexistent.”³⁹ The brevity and the single-minded focus helps readers appreciate linguistic and structural techniques, such as framing, which contribute to closure.

1.8. *How this Book is Organized*

In Chapter 2, I demonstrate how methods of narratology can be used to delimit a narrative and how literary methods can expose the closural conventions within them.⁴⁰ Narratology is the structuralist-inspired theory of narrative. It studies the nature, form, and function of narrative and, more particularly, “what all and only narratives have in common . . . as well as what enables them to be different from one another, and it attempts to account for the ability to produce and understand them.”⁴¹ Using tools of narratology, I show how one determines the parameters of the “end-section.” As a guide and a grid, I use the functional analysis of plot that Emma Kafalenos refined in *Narrative Causalities*.⁴² The Kafalenos system

³⁸ In *Telling It Again and Again*, 53, Bruce F. Kavin suggests that the interconnections in a play such as Shakespeare's *King Lear* require that “the audience have the entire play in its head throughout the performance.” He describes the “allusive technique” used by Shakespeare that makes its moral points by calling attention to differences throughout the play.

³⁹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 11–12, explains that the text contains “only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else is left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent . . . the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and *directed toward a single goal* (and to that extent far more of a unity) remains mysterious and fraught with background” (italics added).

⁴⁰ The use of literary methods to reveal closural conventions extends to some surprising genres. Eyal Segal, in “Closure in Detective Fiction,” 155–63, demonstrates how a synthesis of the methods of B. H. Smith for identifying poetic closure with the “rhetorical-functional” approach that Meir Sternberg applies to biblical texts reveals “a highly elaborate and powerful system of conventions” in the detective genre.

⁴¹ Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 66.

⁴² Gerald Prince kindly suggested Kafalenos' 2006 *Narrative Causalities* early in my examination of narratology for this study. His words, in suggesting it, were that it could function as “a guide and a grid.”

draws from classical narratology, especially from the works of Vladimir Propp and Tzvetan Todorov.

Once the end-section has been defined and explained, I discuss and demonstrate the literary method I employ for reading the narratives and especially the end-sections. This methodology includes close reading of the text along with an awareness of the textual history of the Bible and the interconnectedness of the literary art and themes in the Book of Genesis.

Specific to the genre of these biblical narratives is that they exhibit no physical evidence to mark the beginning or end of an individual narrative, and that issue is addressed first through narratology. I examine the traditional Masoretic markers, which reflect an ancient scribal custom of separating units by spaces and line divisions, although these separating marks are inconsistent and often not satisfactory for indicating the beginnings and ends of narratives. A contemporary theme-based approach has been suggested by some scholars, but I show that this too does not offer a reliable method by which to delimit narratives. There are a few instances in which the Hebrew Bible does use language to indicate the beginning and end of a narrative, and I look at an example from the Book of Deuteronomy (26:5–10) for its boundaries, transformation, end-section, and closing devices.⁴³ Furthermore, since we are dealing with the Hebrew Bible, for which scholars posit the presence of multiple documentary sources, the analysis must deal with the effect on endings when multiple documentary sources are attributed to a single narrative.

Chapters 3 through 6 focus on specific types of linguistic and formal closural devices found in the narratives in this study. The first of these is repetition, an underlying literary principle in biblical prose. Chapter 3 examines repetition for its contributions to closure. As activities on the level of the plot are doubly enacted and as key words, motifs, and themes on the level of the discourse are repeated by the narrator,⁴⁴ the repetitions can help finalize the perception of the changes that occurred in the narrative, suspend the action at the end of a narrative, emphasize didactic points, and surprise and entertain the reader; all of those effects contribute to closure.

⁴³ In addition to the Deuteronomy example, I present a group of narratives, Lev 24:10–23, Num 9:6–13, Num 15:32–36, and Num 27:1–11 and 36:1–12, that are delineated by their contexts in legal materials.

⁴⁴ The term “discourse” refers to *how* a story is told. Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 21, contrasts discourse with its content, or *what* is told.

Chapter 4 brings together other linguistic elements, including hyperbole, absolute words, words that mark closure, and summary statements, and demonstrates how they contribute to closure. In Chapter 5, etiologies, proverbs, and the formulaic language and key words related to those forms are discussed. Chapter 6 demonstrates how ritual actions that end narratives contribute to closure for the participants within the narrative and for the reader.

In Chapter 7 I discuss the issues of closure and anti-closure and their philosophical, psychological, experiential, and psycholinguistic components. In a narrative, as noted above, the removal of instability and the presence of various linguistic and formal closural devices contribute to closure. But other elements work against closure, such as the introduction of new information, unanswered questions, and the noting of events in a later period in time. I present theories of why some stories end somewhat destabilized. Biblical scholars in the past have noted some of the closural devices used by biblical authors, and these are acknowledged, but the devices, whether contributing to or acting against closure, are, for the first time, integrated into a comprehensive study of endings of biblical narrative.

Chapter 8 offers conclusions and ideas for further study.

Appendix to Chapter 1: Narratives in This Study

The pages where these narratives are discussed are listed in Index I.

Genesis	Name
1:1–2:4a	Bereshit
2:4b–3:24	Adam and Eve
2:18–2:24	Creation of woman, embedded
4:1–16	Cain and Abel
6:5–9:17	Flood story, combined
6:5–... 8:22	J-source flood
6:9–... 9:17	P-source flood
9:18–27	Noah's drunkenness
11:1–9	Tower of Babel
12:1–9	Abraham to Canaan
12:10–20	Abraham to Egypt
13:1–18	Abraham and Lot separate
14:1–24	Abraham and foreign kings
15:1–21	God's covenant with Abraham
16:16:1–16	Hagar
17:1–27	Covenant with Abraham, circumcision
18:1–16	Visitors and announcement of the birth of a child to Sarah
18:16–19:29	Sodom and Gomorrah
19:30–38	Lot and his daughters
20:1–18	Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelekh of Gerar
21:1–21	Hagar and Ishmael
21:22–34	Covenant between Abraham and Abimelekh
22:1–19	<i>Akedah</i> (near-sacrifice of Isaac)
23:1–20	Purchase of a burial site for Sarah
24:1–66	Wife for Isaac from the east
25:19–34	Birth and birthright of Esau and Jacob
26:1–11 or 17	Isaac, Rebekah, and Abimelekh of Gerar
26:12–33	Wells of Isaac and the treaty with Abimelekh
27:1–45	Blessing of Jacob by Isaac
27:46–28:9	Jacob's departure for the east
28:10–22	Jacob at night at Bethel
31:1–32:3	Jacob's departure from the East and the treaty with Laban
32:4–33:20	Encounter between Jacob and Esau
32:23–33	Jacob wrestles with a divine being

34:1–31	Dinah
35:1–8	Jacob at Bethel
35:9–15	Jacob and the name change to Israel at Bethel
35:16–20	Death of Rachel
38:1–30	Judah and Tamar

Additional Narratives Discussed

Exodus

32:1–33:23	Moses' tent of meeting
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Leviticus

24:10–23	Blasphemy during a fight
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Numbers

9:6–13	Unclean persons and the Passover sacrifice
15:32	Wood gatherer on Sabbath
27:1–11	Daughters of Zelophehad
36:1–12	Daughters of Zelophehad

Deuteronomy

26:5–10	Recitation of the history of Israel in First-Fruits ceremony
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CHAPTER TWO

ISSUES AND METHODS

2.1. Overview

In order to compare closural devices in the end-sections of narratives, one must identify where the story begins and ends. But biblical narratives have no physical markers for an end-point and certainly none for “end-section.” In contrast, individual books of the Bible were written on separate scrolls and the end of the scroll indicated the end of the book. For most psalms there is a separation from the previous psalm—because superscriptions mark their first lines.¹ The ends of ancient dramas were marked by the exiting of characters.² Modern drama generally ends with the closing of a curtain, and the parameters of poetry, novels, and short stories are marked by their authors with titles and spacing.

The lack of physical separators between stories, however, has not kept readers of the Bible from sensing the parameters of biblical narratives. If one searches for ‘Bible stories’ online one finds approximately 5,670,000 entries, including large sections marked as “Bible stories for kids,” “Bible stories for teens,” “Bible stories for adults,” and so on.³ This suggests that most people have a “sense” of what a narrative (or “story”) is and what its parameters are, and that sense is different from scholarly discussions of

¹ The superscriptions, the titles or designations that introduce most of the psalms, are ancient, although scholars do not attribute them to the original composers of the psalms. See, for example, Hans-Joachim Kraus, in *Psalms 1–59*, 21–31, and Nahum Sarna in “Psalm Superscriptions and the Guilds” in *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History: Presented to Alexander Altmann on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, 281–300. There are seventy-three psalms that have as the title *le-dawid* (“of David”) and Sarna considers these a “late crystallization of [an ancient] trend that gradually displaced earlier and variant traditions,” 284. Nevertheless, he points out that the canonical ascriptions to David have their origin in an “authentic tradition linking David with liturgical music,” 285. Other psalms are attributed to Asaph, to Korahites, and to Heman, and may reflect the responsibility of those pre-exilic clans for these psalms. Kraus identifies and discusses twenty-four psalm titles with which most of the psalms are introduced. Numbering for individual psalms was added during medieval times.

² Don Fowler, “First Thoughts on Closure: Problems and Prospects,” in *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin*, 275.

³ <http://www.google.com> “Bible stories,” 2/10/11.

whether a particular verse is part of one narrative or the next,⁴ or whether a narrative is a stand-alone unit, perhaps part of a series about a single character, or is “embedded” in another narrative.⁵

The reader’s sense of the beginning and end of a narrative may be complicated by an awareness that the lives of the characters precede the beginning point and continue after the story ends. Frank Kermode points out that a writer himself faces a dilemma in delimiting the beginning or end of a narrative.⁶ The writer starts his story “in the midst”; that is, he picks his starting point and his end-point with the awareness that lives and situations precede his story and continue afterward.⁷ This is especially true in Genesis narratives, in which many of the characters’ lives and even the situations in which they find themselves continue from one story to the next. A reader’s sense of that may muddy his understanding of a narrative’s parameters. One example is the two stories, each from a different documentary source, that precede Jacob’s departure for the east when he is blessed by his father.⁸ These stories are consecutive in Genesis; they share the characters Jacob, Esau, Rebekah, and Isaac; and they share the initial situation in which neither of Isaac’s sons has been blessed by his father. In both narratives Rebekah has plans for her son Jacob, and in both Esau is marginalized. As the stories are arranged in their context in Genesis it is easy to imagine them as one continuous narrative. Yet, as will be shown, they are separate, with separate beginnings, transformations, and endings.⁹ For stories like these it is especially helpful to have a system to use as an ‘impartial’ guide to where it begins and ends.

The first phase of this investigation is to define how one goes determining where exactly is the beginning and end of the narrative.

⁴ The question of whether Gen 2:4a is part of the creation narrative that begins with Gen 1:1 or whether it is the beginning of the Adam and Eve narrative that continues through Gen 3:24 is discussed in Chapter 4, n.15

⁵ An example of a narrative that is clearly embedded in another is the story of Jacob’s wrestling with the angel, Gen 32:23–33; it is embedded in the longer story of Jacob’s return to Canaan, Gen 32:1–33. Later in this chapter I examine the Adam and Eve narrative to determine whether the episode of the creation of woman is an embedded narrative.

⁶ The ideas and influence of Frank Kermode, who wrote *The Sense of an Ending* in 1967, were introduced in Chapter 1. Kermode discusses the psychological and metaphysical needs of people to make coherent patterns of their lives and to make those patterns consonant with the structures established in religion and history, even if history and experience are at odds with those patterns.

⁷ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 17.

⁸ Gen 27:1–45 is from the J-source; Gen 27:46–28:9 is from the P-source.

⁹ The separate structure of each of these stories is demonstrated in Chapter 6, in the discussion of the ritual of blessing.

(Sections 2.2 and 2.3). I look first at narratology. That method reveals the structure of the plot, its beginning and end. Because of its focus on plot, narratology is especially well suited to define the moment when the end-section begins, and ends. Alternative methods of delimiting a narrative are also examined.

After the end-section of a story has been defined, then the process of discovering the closural devices can begin. This requires a different method (Section 2.4). For this, I use close reading techniques together with an awareness that each narrative, though it can be viewed as an entity, is part of a larger work that reflects overarching values and themes as well as characters and situations. Many studies of the Bible have been helpful for this literary aspect of the stories, although those studies have generally not focused on the ends of narratives.

At the conclusion of this chapter I demonstrate how knowledge of documentary sources is helpful to understand the strategy that biblical writers and editors used as they ended their narratives. There is, on the other hand, a tendency by some scholars who analyze biblical narrative to work only on the canonical or synchronic level of the text (Section 2.5).¹⁰ Yet biblical scholarship over many years has demonstrated the presence of multiple documentary sources. Different source writers and editors used different vocabulary and had some different issues.¹¹ Interpretations using diachronic readings to reveal the layers of the text, show whether different ending strategies are found in different sources and indicate how the interpolation of a different source can affect an ending.¹²

2.2. *Delimiting a Narrative, Using Narratology*

2.2.1. *Defining a Narrative*

The first step in figuring out how define the beginning and the end-points of a narrative is to establish a working definition of the word narrative. That should be simple, since, as Gerald Prince points out, “all (average)

¹⁰ A “synchronic” study related to the Bible examines the biblical text as it stands in its final form, as it was canonized.

¹¹ David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches*, demonstrates that doublets and breaks in the text demonstrate the locations of “fractures,” that is, places where the multi-authored Genesis text was interwoven from its various sources.

¹² The term “diachronic” for biblical study takes into account the hypothesis that the canonical version is comprised of various sources that were brought together over time.

human beings know how to produce and process narrative at a very early age.”¹³

Everybody may not know how to tell *good* stories but everybody, in every human society known to history and anthropology, knows how to tell stories, and this at a very early age. . . . Furthermore, everybody distinguishes stories from non-stories, that is, everybody has certain intuitions—or has internalized certain rules—about what constitutes a story and what does not.¹⁴

“Narrative” refers to a prose “representation,” that is, a retelling or recounting of events; it includes at least two events or one state and one event that alter it.¹⁵ The genre is distinct from poetry, drama, or prophetic oracles.¹⁶ Also excluded from the category are descriptive lists, such as Gen 4:17–24, which notes aspects of Cain’s and his descendants’ lives after he settled in Nod, and Gen 10, the “Table of Nations” of Noah’s descendants. The term “story,” which is a more common term, technically refers to the chronology or temporal relationship between events in a narrative.¹⁷ Another key term, “plot,” refers to the events of the narrative with emphasis on how they causally relate to each other. E. M. Forster graphically explains the difference between story and plot:

“The king died and then the queen died” is a story. “The king died and then the queen died of grief” is a plot.¹⁸

2.2.2. *The Beginning and End-Points of a Narrative, and Its “End-Section”*

For a narrative, and for this study of biblical narratives, the causally related events of the plot are central to determining its beginning and end.¹⁹ When viewing a plot in this way, elements of language, style, forms, rhetoric, and point of view are removed from the analysis, at least tem-

¹³ Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 59.

¹⁴ Ibid., *A Grammar of Stories*, 9. Italics in the quote were added.

¹⁵ Ibid., *Dictionary of Narratology*, 58.

¹⁶ Jean Louis Ska, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*”: *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, 6. This point is underscored by other authors, including Wallace Martin in *Recent Theories of Narrative*, 81.

¹⁷ Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 93, differentiates between story and plot. A story is “a narrative of events with an emphasis on chronology, as opposed to plot, which is a narrative of events with an emphasis on causality.”

¹⁸ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 82.

¹⁹ Jean Louis Ska, in his concise introduction to narratology and its applicability to the Bible emphatically states that “the delimitation of narrative units depends on one main criterion: the analysis of the plot or the dramatic action.” *Our Fathers Have Told Us*, 2.

porarily. It is basically an abstracting process, which reveals the skeleton of a narrative so that its parameters can be delimited; it is similar to “comparative anatomy” and shows us the structural features shared by similar stories.”²⁰ One can follow the plot of a narrative from the onset of a problem through a causal sequence of events to a resolution.²¹ The *final* causal action brings about a major transformation in the narrative. From this comes the definition of the end-section: the end-section is that part of the narrative that includes the final causal action and the transformation it causes, plus any subsequent related information that the writer shares, which may be in an epilogue or coda.²²

2.2.3. *Causal Steps in a Plot—The Kafalenos Approach*

To demonstrate how one can determine the parameters and end-section of a narrative, I examine the skeleton, or plot structure, of two Genesis narratives: the Adam and Eve story (Gen 2:4b–3:24) and the Abraham story in which he purchases a burial site (Gen 23).

As mentioned previously, analysis of the steps in a plot is an abstracting process and once it has been accomplished one can then “reattach” all the forms and ideas and the author’s literary and didactic devices and analyze the full text as written. It is at that point that the closural devices used by biblical writers and editors in the end-sections of their narratives can be analyzed and compared.

For the analysis of plot I follow the narratological method presented by Emma Kafalenos in *Narrative Causalities*. Her system reveals an abstracted

²⁰ Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narratives*, 107. In defining broad theories of narrative, Martin notes that there are approaches that are not plot dependent; a narrative can be viewed as “a discourse produced by a narrator, or a verbal artifact that is organized and endowed with meaning by its readers,” 82.

²¹ Aristotle first defined the function of plot as the “arrangement of the incidents” in *Poetics*, 17. In 1894, Gustav Freytag proposed a triangular diagrammatic representation of the structure of a tragedy, which, as Prince notes in his *Dictionary*, 36, “has often been used to characterize various aspects of plot in narrative.” In Freytag’s triangular representation, as explained by Prince, the first side of the triangle is “exposition”; that side rises through “complication” to “climax” at the top, and then descends to “catastrophe” as the action is completed.

²² The first creation narrative, Gen 1:1–2:4a, tests the definition of narrative since the events that occur do not cause one another; rather, each event that occurs in the creation process follows a separate edict by God. However, the statement of the “problem” at the beginning, that there was as yet no heaven and earth and the earth was unformed, is resolved by the events of the narrative; linguistic markers (including the words [they] “were finished” and [he] “finished (*k.l.h*)” and “ceased (*š.b.t*)” support the idea that the problem was resolved.

pattern of “functions” that recur in the plots of narratives. The term “function” refers to a position in a causal sequence. That is, one thing happens and causes the next, and that causes the next and that causes the next, and so on, until a stasis is reached. Kafalenos’ theory of narrative functions is drawn in part from that of Vladimir Propp, who analyzed plots in Russian folk tales. In his studies, Propp removed all verbal considerations from the tales and found that all the tales could be described abstractly using thirty-one functions.²³ His named functions for the folk tales included actions such as: a member of a family leaves home (the hero is introduced); an interdiction is addressed to the hero (such as “don’t go there”); the interdiction is violated (a villain enters the tale); a villain causes harm/injury; a victim is taken in by deception, unwittingly helping the enemy; a member of the family lacks something or desires something. The importance of Propp’s theory was that it explained that the *ordered relationship* between elements and not just the elements themselves were the basic unit of narration. Propp saw that not all the functions were needed for any one story and that, most importantly, the functions always occurred in the same sequence.

Kafalenos adapted Propp’s system so that abstraction of a plot can be applied to a wider variety of narratives. I am extending her system to include biblical narratives. Kafalenos limited the number of functions in a plot to ten (compared to Propp’s thirty-one) and generalized them to some extent. As with Propp’s functions, her ten always occur in a prescribed order, and only some of them may appear in any particular narrative.

Before I present Kafalenos’ system, it is valuable to understand two additional elements of her system, for which she is indebted to Tzvetan Todorov. Todorov demonstrated that there *was* a marker at the beginning and end of all the narratives he investigated—it was “equilibrium.” As his data source, Todorov used *The Decameron* by Boccaccio. In his studies of those separate but related stories, Todorov saw that each story began and ended in equilibrium, that is, in a relatively stable situation. He defined equilibrium as the “existence of a stable but not static relation between the members of a society.”²⁴ He even described narrative by its relationship to equilibrium: a narrative is “two moments of equilibrium separated

²³ Vladimir Propp, “Fairy Tale Transformations,” in *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, 94–114.

²⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, “Structural Analysis of Narrative.” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 3, no. 1 (1969), 75. “The minimal complete plot can be seen as the shift from one equilibrium

by a period of imbalance.” For a plot to be complete, it must shift from one equilibrium to another. The newer equilibrium will be similar, but not identical, to the first. Equilibrium as a marker of beginning and end is tested below in narratives whose beginning and end are easily identifiable; these narratives are not in Genesis.

Todorov also explained the role of narrative transformation in a plot.²⁵ Todorov observed that Propp’s syntax of functions led to transformation—a relationship between characters is transformed, distorted facts (or situations) are corrected, a riddle is solved, or a prediction is realized. Over the course of action in a plot, many elements can be transformed. He explained that the *major* plot transformation is what makes a narrative feel or appear complete.

I use the Kafalenos chart of causal functions, or steps, in a narrative to abstract the narrative and reveal the structure of the plot.²⁶ This provides clarity to the actions that mark the advancement of the plot. But it must be remembered that an artistic text is not ‘designed’ to fit into any critic’s system. This approach, like any other, should be viewed as a guide that helps explicate the narrative.

A few of the narratives in this study have minimal action, and for them I use the guide of a “minimal story,” that is, three ‘events’ are conjoined in such a way that the first event precedes the second chronologically and the second precedes the third. The second event, which causes the third, is *the only active event*, and it inverts the initial situation. The first and third events are *stative*.²⁷

In the next few pages I present the Kafalenos paradigm and demonstrate how it applies to biblical narratives.

to another. . . . The two moments of equilibrium are separated by a period of imbalance, which is composed of a process of degeneration and a process of improvement.”

²⁵ Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, 218–233. Todorov lists more than twelve types of transformations on the syntagmatic level of text; these occur in different dimensions, and the more complex transformations relate back to the first action in a narrative.

²⁶ Emma Kafalenos, *Narrative Causalities*, 7.

²⁷ Gerald Prince in *A Grammar of Stories*, 24–31, explains this understanding of a ‘minimal’ story. Two Genesis narratives that fit more comfortably within this rubric rather than that of the Kafalenos approach are Gen 15 and Gen 35:9–15. The reason is that the causative steps, items B through I, are minimal. Very little happens; essentially, a promise or blessing is given to a patriarch, and once that occurs a new equilibrium is in place. The balance of the narrative is based on that new equilibrium. In Gen 15:4–5, Abraham learns that he will have his own son and that his descendants will be numerous; a complex ritual follows this. In Gen 35:9–10, God appears to Jacob at Bethel, blesses him, and gives Jacob the name Israel. God states his promises for the future to Jacob and leaves, and Jacob enacts a ritual at that location.

2.2.4. *The Kafalenos Paradigm*

In the Kafalenos paradigm there are ten functions that occur in unvarying order; not all of them appear in any one narrative.²⁸ Initially in a narrative an equilibrium is in place; then a causal action destabilizes the equilibrium and initiates the plot. There is a key transformation that ends the plot and a new equilibrium is in place. The new equilibrium reflects a new status quo that is stable but not static.

The causal functions (those between the two equilibriums) are alphabetized. A, C, H, and I are the key functions; B, D, E, F, and G are the less common ones. In this system, the character that is the protagonist in the narrative is referred to as the C-actant. Because of the nature of the texts to which I am applying this system, Kafalenos' terminology must sometimes be modified to reflect the Bible's understanding of God's unique characteristics, particularly God's omnipotence and omniscience. For example, the language for steps D (the protagonist is tested) and F (the protagonist acquires empowerment) should be modified when God is the protagonist (C-actant) in a narrative. In these biblical stories, the writer does not imagine that God could be "tested" in the sense of successfully challenging his ability or power to do something that he chooses to do.²⁹ A more appropriate term for those instances is that God or God's actions would be "questioned."

²⁸ Occasionally the Kafalenos paradigm indicates that a particular step or a group of steps repeats. As will be shown, this is particularly helpful in identifying embedded narratives and narratives that are comprised of brief episodes before they reach their conclusion.

²⁹ There are, however, instances where the word "test" (*n.s.h* or *b.h.n*) is used in the Bible in reference to God. The instances of these words, however, express Israel's testing the *relationship* between God and Israel, and are not a challenge to God's power. When Sarah, in her old age, wonders about her ability to have a child, God responds, "Is anything too wondrous for the Lord?" (Gen 18:14).

Examples of testing the relationship between God and Israel include: Exod 17:2, where Moses asks the people, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you 'try/test' (*n.s.h* in *piel*) the Lord?" Also, Exod 17:7: "The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and because they 'tried/tested' (*n.s.h* in *piel*) the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord present among us or not?' " Also, in Mal 3:10, the Lord challenges the people, "Bring the full tithe to the storehouse . . . and thus put me to the 'test' " (*b. h.n*). God's point here is that *he* has not changed in his relationship with Israel (Mal 3:6–12).

Kafalenos Paradigm

EQ, equilibrium

A, a destabilizing event occurs, or a, a re-evaluation reveals instability

B, there is a request that someone alleviate A or a

C, decision by the C-actant to attempt to alleviate A or a. The C-actant is the character who performs function C¹ and HC¹, C-actant's initial act to alleviate A or a

D, C-actant is tested

E, C-actant responds to test

F, C-actant acquires empowerment

G, C-actant arrives at the place, or time, for H

H, C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a

I or I (negative), success (or failure) of H

EQ, a new equilibrium is established

2.2.5. Equilibrium as a Marker of Beginning and End

Some narratives do have beginnings and ends that are more clearly delimited, and I use some examples that are not from Genesis to demonstrate that a changed equilibrium corresponds to the end of a narrative. These particular narratives are different from those in Genesis in that each has a decidedly didactic function in its immediate context. The first narrative, Deut 26:5*ab*–10*a*, is a recitation within a prescriptive ritual that Moses imparts to the Israelites prior to their entry into the land. The other narratives establish legal precedents by means of an illustrating narrative: Lev 24:10–23, Num 15:32–36, Num 9:6–13, Num 27:1–11, and Num 36:1–12.

The delimited narrative in Deuteronomy is the retelling of the history of Israel. Moses tells the Israelites that once they are settled in the new land they must repeat these words as part of the ritual of First Fruits. The recitation is set apart through introductory words and through a change from second- to first-person forms. Moses introduces the recitation with the words “You shall then recite as follows³⁰ before the Lord your God” (26:5*a*). The recitation begins, “My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation.” The narrative commences from this initial equilibrium.³¹ The steps of the narrative then trace Israel's

³⁰ A more literal translation of the Hebrew is, “You shall speak and say before the Lord your God.” The delimiting words “as follows,” added to the English translation (NJPS), reflect the purpose of Moses' introduction.

³¹ This narrative does not describe a causal relationship between Israel's initial small population and its growth in Egypt. The “destabilizing event” is that Egypt deals harshly with them. In an Exodus narrative that treats the same topic, a causal relationship is

difficulties in Egypt, God's response, and finally God's primary action to help the people establish a new equilibrium in their own land.³² The "steps" in the narrative are causally related, as demonstrated in the Kafalenos paradigm for *Deut 26:5ab–10*.

*Kafalenos Paradigm for Deut 26:5ab–10, Recitation of Israel's History
in First Fruits Ritual*

	Functions	Steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	The people, all descendants of "my" fugitive Aramean father and his few relatives who had migrated to Egypt, are living in Egypt as a great and very populous nation, verse 5.
A	<i>Destabilizing event</i>	The Egyptians deal harshly with them, 6.
B	<i>Request that someone alleviate A</i>	They ask God for help, 7.
C	<i>Decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A.</i>	God hears them and sees their plight, 7b.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A. (This action brings about the key transformation.)</i>	God frees them, 8.
I	<i>Success (or failure) of H.</i>	God brings them to their own land, a land of plenty, 9.
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	The people are freed from the Egyptians and are given a fruitful land.

The other narratives that are clearly delimited are primarily in legal texts, and their function is to derive a new law to deal with the particular issue that is the "destabilizing event" of its narrative. The initial equilibrium

explicit (Exod 1:8–12): "A new king arose over Egypt... He said, 'Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies...' So they set taskmasters over them... But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased... so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites."

³² The final verse, *Deut 26:10a*, is an etiology and causes a temporal shift from the story-time to a current time. Such a temporal shift is a common, formulaic ending device for narratives. That device is discussed as a phenomenon in Chapter 5.

in these narratives is that there is no law covering a particular issue; the end equilibrium is that a relevant law has been promulgated and in some cases enacted. In the first of these, a man blasphemes and he is placed in custody while Moses inquires of God what should be done with him (Lev 24:10–23). The causal steps in this narrative are outlined in the Kafalenos paradigm for Lev 24:10–24:³³

Kafalenos Paradigm for Lev 24:10–24, Narrative, Law for Blasphemy

	Function	Steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	No law dealing with blasphemy, and apparently no need for one.
A (or a)	<i>Destabilizing event</i>	A man who has an Israelite mother and Egyptian father pronounces and blasphemes the name of God, as he is in the midst of a fight with an Israelite, 10–11.
B	<i>Request that someone alleviate A</i>	People bring the blasphemer to Moses, 11.
C ¹	<i>C-actant's initial act to alleviate A or a.</i>	Moses places blasphemer in custody (until God's decision is made known), 12.
F	<i>C-actant acquires empowerment</i>	God tells Moses the law for blasphemy, 13–16.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A</i>	Moses relates the law to the people, 23.
I, or I (neg)	<i>Success (or failure) of H</i>	People take the blasphemer outside the camp and stone him, according to the law, 23.
EQ	New equilibrium	There is a law for blasphemy; the blasphemer himself is dead.

The other narratives in this group follow a similar arc of causal events that lead to a new equilibrium: an unclean person wants to offer a Passover sacrifice (Num 9:6–13), a man gathers wood on the Sabbath (Num 15:32–36), and the daughters of Zelophehad, whose father had no sons, wish to

³³ Verses 17–22 of Lev 24:10–23 are not part of the causal steps of the narrative; the verses provide information related to the legal and theological underpinnings of the law for blasphemy.

perpetuate their father's holdings in the land (Num 27:1–11 and 36:1–12).³⁴ In each of these, the narrative is set apart from its context. In each the initial equilibrium indicates that there is no law relating to the issue at hand. Then Moses asks God what he should do (or there is an ellipsis in which Moses inquires of God). At the end of each narrative there is a new equilibrium: a law is established to deal with the issue.

2.2.6. *Using the Kafalenos System to Delimit Gen 23, Abraham's Purchase of a Burial Site*

In the Genesis stories in this study, there are no characters that “introduce” a narrative as Moses did in the Deuteronomy example. Nor are the narratives sandwiched into legal texts. For narratives without these markers, the Kafalenos paradigm is helpful because it is designed to identify the initial equilibrium and the equilibrium at the end, as well as the causal steps between those points. It allows one to more easily identify the *beginning* of the end-section—one can observe at what point in the story the destabilized action or situation is righted, that is, where the transformation occurs.

Genesis 23 is an example of how the Kafalenos paradigm works. The story begins with the statement of Sarah's death at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven and with Abraham mourning her death (Gen 23: 1–2). The lack of a suitable burial site precipitates the action.³⁵ Abraham rises and goes to the Hittites, identifying himself as a resident alien who would not normally own land, and he asks that they sell him land in which to bury Sarah (3–4). They do offer a burial site that he can use (5–6), but Abraham counters that they should intercede on his behalf with a local Hittite, Ephron, who should *sell* some of his land to Abraham at the full price (7–9). Ephron, too, initially offers free *use* of land, but Abraham perseveres and Ephron agrees to sell him a piece of land at what appears to be a very high price (10–15). Abraham pays him the requested amount in the sight of witnesses to the transaction (16). This is the transformative action. It alleviates Abraham's perception of an unsettled situation—that he does not own land in which to bury his wife (4). The four verses that follow the transformation are an epilogue (see Section 2.2.8) in which the

³⁴ Num 27:1–11 and Num 36:1–12 are two separate narratives in which the second modifies the law promulgated in the first.

³⁵ In Gen 23, Sarah's death does not cause the subsequent actions in the narrative; the lack of a proper burial site does.

narrator emphasizes the legality of the transaction (17–20).³⁶ The end-section includes the transformative verse of his land-purchase and the information that follows, that is, verses 16–20.

These points are schematically represented in the Kafalenos paradigm for Gen 23. Note that in this example certain causal steps are repeated, namely, the testing and re-testing of the C-actant, Abraham, first by the Hittites and then by Ephron.

Kafalenos Paradigm, Gen 23, Purchase of a Burial Site for Sarah

	Function	Steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Abraham is in Kiriath-Arba, also known as Hebron in Canaan; his wife, Sarah, has died and he is in mourning for her, 1–2.
A (or a)	<i>Destabilizing event, or re-evaluation that reveals instability (a).</i>	Abraham needs to bury his wife on land that he himself owns, but he does not own land. His perception that he must own a burial site is not stated in the narrative until verse 4, when it is revealed by Abraham.
C	<i>Decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A or a. The C-actant is the character who performs function C.</i>	Abraham rises from mourning Sarah and goes to the Hittites, 3.
C ¹	<i>C-actant's initial act to alleviate A or a.</i>	Abraham asks the Hittites to sell him a burial site, 4.

³⁶ Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 160–161, describing these verses as “a legal summation,” writes that the burial legally completes the transaction and makes the sale “absolute and incontestable, and that confers the power to dispose of the property by testament or will.”

There may be legal differences between the sale of property to be used for burial and other types of property. Property used for burial may be special, with its own legal considerations, as indicated in the history of “various societies ancient and modern,” according to Delbert R. Hillers, “Palmyrene Inscriptions and the Bible,” *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 11 (1989), 40–44. In Genesis, non-burial property is acquired by Jacob in Gen 33:19. Jacob’s is “a parcel of land [in or near Shechem] where he pitched his tent [which] he purchased from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for a hundred *kesitahs*.”

Table (cont.)

	Function	Steps in the narrative
D-1	<i>C-actant is tested</i>	The Hittites offer Abraham a choice site of theirs (but not ownership of it), 5–6.
E-1	<i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Abraham counters that the Hittites should intercede on his behalf with Ephron to allow him to purchase a burial site at the edge of Ephron's land, at the full price, 7–9.
D-2	<i>C-actant is tested</i>	Ephron offers to give Abraham land in which to bury his dead, 10–11.
E-2	<i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Abraham responds that he wants to pay for the land, 12–13.
F	<i>C-actant acquires empowerment</i>	Ephron agrees to sell (at a high price), 14–15.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a</i>	Abraham accepts Ephron's terms and pays him, 16.
I, or I (neg)	<i>Success (or failure) of H.</i>	The land legally passes to Abraham; he buries Sarah in the burial place, 17–20.
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	Abraham owns land as a possession in Canaan, 17–20.

2.2.7. *Finding an Embedded Narrative Using the Kafalenos System:*
Gen 2–3, The Creation and Adam and Eve

The presence of embedded narratives was noted for ancient Greek novels by Don Fowler³⁷ and for Boccaccio's fourteenth-century *Decameron* by Tzvetan Todorov.³⁸ Gerald Prince explains that although there may be "several narrations in a narrative," in every case there is one main

³⁷ Don Fowler, "Second Thoughts on Closure," in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, 18, noted the presence of "convoluted nested stories" in Greek novels.

³⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, in his analysis of the stories in *The Decameron* in *The Poetics of Prose*, 5–22, 1971 and 1977, noted variations in the relationships between some of the stories. Some were embedded in others, some were alternating, and some were combined sequentially in such a way that an event that resolved one sequence initiated a new sequence.

narration and that one introduces all the others.³⁹ The others, the embedded narratives, are secondary or tertiary narratives.

In the Genesis narratives sometimes the presence of an embedded narrative is obvious. Within the saga of Jacob, Jacob wrestles with a man/divine being on his return home. That story has its own beginning equilibrium, destabilization, transformation, and end equilibrium (Gen 32:23–33).⁴⁰ Whether other narratives are embedded is less clear. For example, in the Adam and Eve story scholars have different opinions as to whether it is one long narrative or a series of shorter related ones (Gen 2:4a–3:24).⁴¹ The Kafalenos paradigm for Gen 2:4a–3:24 demonstrates that the creation of woman is an embedded narrative within the longer Adam and Eve story.

Kafalenos Paradigm, Gen 2:4a–3:24, Adam and Eve

Function, (main narrative)	Function, (embedded narrative)	Function	Steps in the plot of the Adam and Eve narrative
EQ		<i>Equilibrium</i>	Man is living in the Garden and tending it, but not eating fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and bad; the tree of life is also in the Garden, 2:17.
	a	<i>Re-evaluation reveals instability</i>	God observes that it is not good for man to be alone, 2:18a.
	C	<i>C-actant decides to act</i>	God decides to make a “fitting helper for the man,” 2:18b.
	D	<i>C-actant is tested</i> ⁴²	God brings animals to Adam, but they are not fitting for Adam, 2:19–21.

³⁹ In *Narratology*, 35, Gerald Prince noted the phenomenon of embedded narratives and suggested a generalizing principle. “In every case the [narrative] which ultimately introduces all the others constitutes the main narration; the others are secondary narrations, or tertiary ones, etc.” See also his earlier *Grammar of Stories*, 71–77.

⁴⁰ Gen 32:23–33 is discussed more fully in Section 5.2.1.

⁴¹ An approach suggested by Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narrative* is presented in Section 2.3.1.

⁴² As noted above, the term “tested” in this paradigm is inappropriate when the C-actant is God. The story does not suggest that God himself is tested, but rather that his initial suggestions of who would be a fitting helper for the man were rejected.

Table (cont.)

Function, (main narrative)	Function, (embedded narrative)	Function	Steps in the plot of the Adam and Eve narrative
	G	<i>C-actant arrives at the time for H</i>	God puts Adam to sleep so he can remove his rib, 2:21.
	H	<i>Primary action to alleviate a</i>	God fashions a woman for the man, 2:22.
	I	<i>Success of H</i>	Man expresses his happiness, 2:23.
A		<i>Destabilizing action</i>	Woman eats fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and bad; man also eats it, 3:1–6.
C		<i>C-actant's decision to act</i>	God confronts the man and woman, 3:8–13.
C ¹		<i>C-actant's initial action</i>	God punishes serpent, woman, man, 3:14–19.
H		<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A</i>	Man and woman are expelled from Eden, 3:23.
I		<i>Success of H</i>	The man and woman can never return and thereby will not gain immortality, 3:24.

As the chart demonstrates, the Adam and Eve narrative contains an embedded narrative, the creation of woman (Gen 2:18–24). For both narratives, the initial equilibrium is that man is living in the Garden of Eden; for both, the C-actant is God. For the embedded narrative, the key element of the equilibrium is that only “the man” is living in the Garden. God perceives the aloneness of the man as a “not good” situation, and he takes steps to alleviate it. The transformation occurs when God fashions woman (22). The transformation plus the information that follows (man names her “Woman” and a proverb is related) form the end-section of the embedded narrative, that is, Gen 2:22–24.

In the main narrative, the action that destabilizes the initial equilibrium is the couple’s disobedience regarding God’s order not to eat from the tree of knowledge (Gen 3:6). The destabilization is alleviated when God punishes Adam and Eve (and the serpent) and they are banished from the Garden (14–24). The major transformation has occurred in the story,

and with that a new equilibrium is established. Additional information is added as well. God stationed “cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword to guard the way to the tree of life” (24). The end-section is 3:14–24.

In the two charts above, the Kafalenos paradigm shows that the causal actions of narratives proceed in a pre-defined order, from equilibrium to destabilizing action or perception, and finally to a transforming action that re-stabilizes the conditions so that a new equilibrium is established. Moreover, the examples show that sometimes causal functions can repeat and that a complete narrative can be embedded in another narrative.

2.2.8. *What Happens after the Transformation*

What the Kafalenos paradigm does not do (and what it is not designed to do) is analyze the structure and purpose of information in the end-section that follows the new equilibrium. Yet it was typical for writers of the short biblical narratives in Genesis to add information after the new equilibrium. Usually that is accomplished in a verse or two, as at the end of the Garden of Eden narrative discussed above. Sometimes more verses are added, as in the Abraham narrative (Gen 23).

Forms at the ends of narratives were examined in 1925 by the Russian formalist Boris M. Eichenbaum. He noticed that there would often be a shift in time-scale or orientation and that there would also be an element of *Nachgeschichte*, or after-history, for the major characters.⁴³ He saw these qualities at the ends of long and complex narratives, but rarely in short ones, and called that element an “epilogue.”⁴⁴ The term epilogue as

⁴³ Boris M. Eichenbaum [Ejxenbaum], “O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story.” This was translated into English in 1971 for *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, 232. Eichenbaum used the term “end,” not end-section, which I am using here because it is more precise.

In describing epilogues in novels, Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, 84, suggests two purposes that these types of endings provide. First, they add closural elements and, second, when the time shifts forward toward the reader, “they graft the novel, which when read is apart from life, back onto the real time of history, joining it and the reader to our world.”

Epilogues in the short biblical narratives often include specific forms or sub-genres, such as etiologies, rituals, or proverbs; these are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, and it is shown how each type contributes to closure.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 232, analyzes a likely reason for this disparity. “An enormous role is played in the novel by the techniques of retardation and of linking and welding together disparate materials, by skill in deploying and binding together episodes, in creating diverse centers, in conducting parallel intrigues, and so on. With that sort of structuring, the ending of the novel is a point of letup and not intensification. The culmination of the main line of action must come somewhere *before* the ending. Typical of the novel are “epilogues”—false

used in narratology suggests that it is integral to a narrative and not an appendix. Gerald Prince explains that the real purpose of an epilogue is “to help . . . fully realize the design of the work.”⁴⁵ Deborah Roberts, writing about classical studies, sees in the epilogue a writer’s “response” to a reader’s “need . . . to know what happens, the ‘aftermath.’”⁴⁶

Some Genesis narratives with relatively more expansive end-sections do have epilogues. They mention new events within their verses, as does Gen 23, which refers to Sarah’s actual burial (Gen 23:19). Other narratives with epilogues in their end-sections include the P-source Flood story (Gen 6–9), the story of the separation of Abraham and Lot (Gen 13), and the story of Dinah (Gen 34).⁴⁷

The epilogue in Gen 23 helps fulfill the didactic purpose of the story, that is, it affirms the legitimacy of Abraham’s purchase of the burial site. The geographical location of the site is reconfirmed as Ephron’s in Machpelah near Mamre, and it explains that the contemporary name for Mamre in Canaan is Hebron. Topographical markers of the site are noted: the field has a cave and trees. A second set of witnesses is noted, “all who entered the gate of his town.” Further, when it states that Abraham buried his wife there it confirms that the land is being used as Abraham had promised. In all these ways the epilogue is integral to the purpose of the story.

The term “coda” or “disjunctive coda” is sometimes used in place of epilogue. In his analysis of vernacular narratives, William Labov observed that as people recounted stories, they ended with “free clauses at the ends

endings, summations setting the perspective or informing the reader of the *Nachgeschichte* of the main characters . . . The short story, on the contrary, gravitates expressly toward the maximal unexpectedness of a finale concentrating around itself all that has preceded it. In the novel there must be a descent of some kind after the culmination point, whereas it is most natural for a story to come to a peak and stay there.”

⁴⁵ Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, 27. Epilogues in novels are discussed by Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, 84; in spoken narrative by William Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, 365–366; in short stories by John Gerlach, *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story*; in poems by Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, 189–192.

⁴⁶ Deborah Roberts, “Afterword: Ending and Aftermath,” in *Classical Closure*, 252, notes that epilogues “suggest not only the familiar desire of readers for endings but also a kind of contractual disagreement over what really constitutes an ending.” She differentiates between the final ending and the prior one, which completed the plot. She suggests that the first ending “in some ways falls short of satisfactory closure.” The reader, that is, the implied reader as understood by the author, wants more information. In Euripides this is accomplished by the use of epilogue or prophecy “that tells us how things turn out,” 254–256.

⁴⁷ The closural devices in these epilogues are discussed in Chapter 4. The anti-closural effect of the epilogue to Gen 34 is discussed in Chapter 7.

of narratives,” and that signaled that the narrative was finished and “*none of the events that followed were important to the narrative*” (italics added).⁴⁸ The “good coda,” according to Labov, “leaves the listener with a feeling of satisfaction and completeness that matters have been rounded off and accounted for.”⁴⁹ Although Labov extended the function of codas to include all the characteristics associated with the word epilogue, the term tends to be used for brief markers of the end, such as “Goodbye” or “See you later” in conversation. In Japanese *haiku* poetry, B. H. Smith reports, a single word such as *kana* or *yo*, which has no independent meaning, functions somewhat as a punctuation mark.⁵⁰ These terminal forms are called ‘cutting’ words, *keriji*, and if they mean anything at all it is simply, “this poem ends here.” In the Hebrew Bible, primarily in the Book of Psalms, the word “*selah*” may indicate the completion of a portion of the poem.⁵¹

2.3. Alternate Approaches for Delimiting a Narrative

2.3.1. Yairah Amit and Robert Alter

There are, of course, methods other than narratology for delimiting a biblical narrative. A greater emphasis on the reader’s role is suggested by Yairah Amit, who bases her theories on those of Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg.⁵² The reader, she says, helps define the boundaries of a unit based on what he or she determines is the subject of the unit. Amit imposes some limits on the readers’ inclinations: the beginning or end of a narrative may not be superseded by the biblical editor’s comments

⁴⁸ Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 365.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 368, n. 8.

⁵⁰ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 187 and note.

⁵¹ The word *selah* is found 72 times in the Hebrew Bible, primarily in Psalms. There is no consensus among scholars regarding its meaning or role, although it may have a meaning relating to stopping at that point, perhaps to mark a conclusion of a portion of a psalm. See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Continental Commentary*, 27–29. Early studies include those of Norman H. Snaith, “*Selah*,” *Vetus Testamentum* 2, no. 1 (1952): 43–56, and R. Gyllenberg, “Die Bedeutung des Wortes Sela,” *ZAW* 58 (1940/1941): 153–156.

⁵² Amit, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 14–16. Amit attributes these criteria to two of Menahem Perry and Meir Sternberg’s articles in *Hasifrut/Literature*: “The King through Irony: Eyes: The Narrator’s Devices in the Biblical Story of David and Bathsheba and Two Excursions on the Theory of Narrative Text,” *Hasifrut/Literature* 1: 263–292, and “Caution: A Literary Text! Problems in the Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative,” *Hasifrut/Literature* 2: 608–663. See also by Amit, “*Al Siumim u-bi’kar ‘al hasium hamehefakh*” [“On Conclusions, Particularly Inappropriate Ones”] in *Iyune Mikra u-farshanut*.

(phrases like “And it came to pass”); or by an *inclusio* (which is termed “frame” in this study); or by time, language, or style.

For the Adam and Eve narrative(s), Amit sees the possibility of three sets of parameters, based on how one gives a title to all or part of the story. If the reader decides that the title of the narrative is “The Story of the Garden of Eden,” then Adam and Eve is one narrative with a long expository introduction that summarizes a philosophical discourse in which negative elements are posed against positive (Gen 2:4b–3:24).⁵³ In that scenario, the *active* portion of the narrative begins at 3:1b, when the serpent appears, and it continues to 3:24, with the banishment. Amit herself prefers this possibility.⁵⁴ Another reader, she suggests, could provide two other separate (and overlapping) titles, “The Sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden,” which would encompass 3:1–7, or “The Sin and Punishment in the Garden of Eden,” which would encompass 2:25–3:24.⁵⁵

An impressionistic approach for determining parameters of a narrative has been suggested by Robert Alter in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.⁵⁶ Although he does not directly address the subject of delimiting a narrative, he describes how an “event” (he does not use the term narrative) can be identified as it gradually emerges in the biblical text. The signs of this emergence are the slowing of the narrative tempo (to allow details to come into focus) and the exposition of characters and information. Action and dialogue follow, and sometimes the end is marked by the rising and return of characters to a place of origin:

A proper narrative event occurs when the narrative tempo slows down enough for us to discriminate a particular scene; to have the illusion of the scene’s “presence” as it unfolds; to be able to imagine the interaction of personages or sometimes personages and groups, together with the freight of motivations, ulterior aims, character traits, political, social, or religious constraints, moral and theological meanings, borne by their speech, gestures, and acts.⁵⁷

Although Alter does not discuss how he would apply his technique to the Adam and Eve narrative(s), he might read the tempo as slowing down

⁵³ Ibid., 42–45. The negative elements are money, represented by gold and precious stones; sex, represented by their being naked; work for survival, represented by work for preservation and pleasure; and finally death, represented by the tree of life. The positive elements are innocence, immortality, and the absence of materialist values.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 157, n. 23.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 20–21.

⁵⁶ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 80–87.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 63.

when God forms man (Gen 2:7–8) or places him in the Garden and speaks to him and decides to make a “fitting helper” (beginning with 2:15).⁵⁸ It slows down again in the scene in the Garden when the serpent speaks to Eve (3:1b). Alter also mentions that some events or episodes are marked at the end by formulas. One that he discusses is that of people rising up and going off to a different place;⁵⁹ with this approach the final departure of Adam and Eve from the Garden would mark the end.

The approaches of Alter and Amit are valuable, but for the purposes of this study it is important to give prominence to the plot structure of each narrative so that end-sections can be identified and then comparisons made between them. The strength of the narratological system is that it assumes that the narratives have final causal events that indicate their ends. The causal event provides the key transformation in the narrative and, therefore, the end of the plot. When one looks at the narrative ‘whole’ again, the beginning of the end-section is evident.⁶⁰

2.3.2. *Masoretic Tradition*

The Masoretic tradition presents a different type of alternative for delimiting parameters. Units in the text of the Hebrew Bible⁶¹ are separated by spaces within lines and between lines; certain spaces seem to suggest sense units.⁶² The spaces, which reflect an ancient scribal custom, are found in the texts from Qumran⁶³ and elsewhere in the Judean Desert, which date from approximately 250 BCE to 135 CE, and in medieval manuscripts and modern printings of the Hebrew Bible. The system of subdividing a text into units by means of spacing was used in many texts in antiquity, sacred

⁵⁸ In *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, Alter adheres to the chapter numbering system that was “transferred to the manuscripts and editions of the Hebrew Bible” after being introduced in the thirteenth century by Archbishop Stephen Langton from Canterbury, England (Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 52).

⁵⁹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 65 and 142–143.

⁶⁰ The concept of a gestalt perception of wholeness as it applies to literature is discussed in Chapter 3; see especially the references to Tanya Reinhart’s “Principles of Gestalt Perception in the Temporal Organization of Narrative Texts,” *Linguistics* 22 (1984), 779–809.

⁶¹ There are different medieval manuscripts of the “Masoretic Text” with variations and differences among them. See Jordan S. Penkower, “The Chapter Divisions in the 1525 Rabbinic Bible,” *Vetus Testamentum* 48, no. 3 (1998): 350–374, and his “Verse Divisions in the Hebrew Bible,” *Vetus Testamentum* 50, no. 3 (2000): 379–393. See also Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 1–17, for an overview of the types of differences in the texts.

⁶² Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 50–52.

⁶³ Qumran itself was destroyed in 70 CE.

and nonsacred, in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. In the Judean Desert this system of division was the rule rather than the exception for texts of all types.⁶⁴

In the Masoretic text tradition, one subdivision, known as *parašah petuḥah* (open section or paragraph), has an open space at the end of the line, with the text resuming on a new line. Another subdivision, the *parašah setumah* (closed section or paragraph), is indicated by a space left within the line. In late medieval Masoretic manuscripts the sections were indicated by the Hebrew letters פ (peh for “open”) or ס (samekh for “closed”), written in the spaces themselves.⁶⁵

The purpose of these divisions is not clear.⁶⁶ In *Textual Criticism*, Emanuel Tov suggests that these were the beginnings and subdivisions of new topics, but in a more recent study he raises questions related to consistency. He notes, for example, that the Book of Ruth has no sense divisions at all, “although they are called for at several points in the story,” and Genesis has “far fewer sense divisions than the other narrative books.”⁶⁷ Tov suggests a re-evaluation of the purpose of these divisions:

The idea of consistently subdividing a larger unit into smaller ones may well be a western concept, even though such subdivision can often be demonstrated. It is probably safer to assume that scribes often directed their attention to the type of relation between the unit they had just copied and

⁶⁴ Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts from the Judean Desert*, 143; see his p. 14 for the dates of the Hebrew texts found in the Judean Desert. However, for legal texts, specifically the Temple Scroll, see Bernard M. Levinson and Molly M. Zahn, “Revelation Regained: the Hermeneutics of כִּי and מֵאֵל in the Temple Scroll,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 9, no. 3 (Nov 2002): 311, who suggest that based on the presence of spacings preceding the conditional כִּי, there was a consciousness on the part of the author of the literary division of biblical law. In that scroll, 11QT, the conditional כִּי “marked the beginning of a new unit of law.”

⁶⁵ Mordechai Breuer’s editions of the Tanakh (1977; 1996), the Keter Yerushalayim edition (ed. Yosef Ofer 2000), and Aharon Dotan’s *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (2001) show only the spaces; *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* adds the peh and samekh markers.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, 6 and 344, n. 26 and n. 27, finds that the key element of the traditional divisions in Deuteronomy is according to the themes of “obedience and disobedience.” He compares the English translation, which separates units into paragraphs, with the pre-modern Hebrew texts, including the Masoretic texts. Whereas the English translation separates units according to “shifts in time, place, action, speaker, and other narrative details, these Hebrew texts divide the narrative into fewer units and frequently consider speeches, especially statements by God, as the turning points in the events.” He adds that the Masoretic manuscripts often disagree with each other in regard to the peh and samekh breaks.

⁶⁷ Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 50; in *Delimitation Criticism*, 330–331, Tov compares the use of these divisions with a statistical analysis of the frequency of divisions in Codex L.

that they were about to copy, without forming an opinion on the adjacent units.⁶⁸

When one studies the **פ** and **ב** separating markers that appear in the Genesis narratives, this later consideration of Tov seems most appropriate. The Genesis separators sometimes occur at the ends of their narratives and sometimes not, and at times they occur within narratives.⁶⁹ As the Masoretic system is not consistent in that it does not always mark the ends of narratives, it is not useful for this study.

Now that I have shown the benefits of the narratology approach for delimiting narratives and identifying their end-sections, I can evaluate the artistry and didactic intention used by the biblical writers and editors in the end-sections of the narratives.

2.4. *Artistic and Didactic Strategy in a Biblical Narrative Ending*

Over the last decades there has been much literary study of the Bible. One of the influences has been the technique of close reading, a method that was initially applied to non-biblical literature, primarily poetry, within the context of the theories of New Criticism that developed in the first half of the twentieth century. In that system, all details and qualities of language and form were focused upon; the unit under study, whether poem, story, or novel, was viewed in isolation and social or historical context was excluded.⁷⁰ Although the theories of New Criticism have been superseded by the theories and methods of reader-response,⁷¹

⁶⁸ Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices*, 144. See also his chapter "Sense Divisions" in *Delimitation Criticism*, 312–350, in which he states, "All systems of dividing and subdividing the text are necessarily subjective and impressionistic, and even more so is the hierarchical relation between such divisions. That is, a sense division which was denoted as an open section by one scribe could be denoted as a closed one by the scribe of another manuscript of the same composition," 323.

⁶⁹ There is no marker at the end of the Cain and Abel narrative, Gen 4:16. There is no marker at the end of the narrative of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt, Gen 12:20. A number of brief narratives about Isaac are grouped together as if they were one, Gen 26:1–33. The first creation story (Gen 1:1–2:3 or 4a) is marked at the end but is also marked at the end of each of the seven days of creation.

⁷⁰ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 38–45.

⁷¹ Wallace Martin, in *Recent Theories of Narratives*, 152–171, presents reader-response criticism as a reaction to New Criticism and formalism, which had emphasized the formal features of literature. It was a means of explaining the different responses that people have to literary texts, 152. Various models have been proffered, including those that focus on the role of the individual reader and others that focus on the role of the individual literary text to control all or part of the response.

structuralism,⁷² and post-structuralism,⁷³ the techniques of close reading are still valid for reading a text on a detailed level. This can be discerned in both biblical and non-biblical narrative analyses.⁷⁴ In the area of biblical narrative, studies by Moshe Greenberg, Robert Alter, Shimon Bar-Ephrat, Aharon Mirsky, Isaac B. Gottlieb, and Adele Berlin contributed to this analysis of narrative endings.

2.4.1. *Moshe Greenberg and Robert Alter: Close Reading of a Biblical Text*

The influence of close reading is apparent in a list of questions prepared by Moshe Greenberg in his “Questions for Uncovering the Message of a Biblical Text.”⁷⁵ Greenberg suggested that one first look at structures and language that maintains unity and at opening and closing formulas to

In a recent essay, “Literary Approaches to Biblical Literature: General Observations and a Case Study of Genesis 34,” in *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship*, Adele Berlin contrasts a reader-response analysis of Gen 34 by Dana Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn with that of Meir Sternberg. The latter sees the locus of meaning in the text; the role of the reader is to figure out all the nuances and meanings that are left there by the writer/narrator. Fewell and Gunn use many of the same tools of analysis as Sternberg, but give the reader responsibility for understanding the meaning of the text and its values. In their view, Jacob is to be admired; they oppose the attitude of his two sons, “the brothers,” who insist on their rights no matter the consequences. Sternberg demonstrates that for him, the text wants the reader to be sympathetic to the brothers, despite a reader’s having an initial negative view.

⁷² A basic assumption of structuralism, Wallace Martin explains in *Recent Theories*, 26, is that all stories are shaped by conventions and imagination and are not realistic representations of life. The aim of structuralism, with its many avatars, is to find the models upon which the conventions are based, in the same way that structural linguistics can explain the structure of human language.

⁷³ Post-structuralism rejects structuralism’s presumption of “a center, a fixed principle, a hierarchy of meanings and a solid foundation.” In *Recent Theories*, 116, Martin explains how to a post-structuralist writer, language itself is less stable than earlier theorists presumed, and as a result, fragmentation, extreme subjectivity, and a lack of logical coherence is the appropriate response of literature to the human condition.

⁷⁴ As I discuss further, narratives in Genesis should not be looked at in isolation because they are part of the larger history of Israel with its ethical values and theological vision. As Alter explains in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, that there is “a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former,” 19. See also Alter’s *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, 15. At the same time, source criticism scholarship helps identify the components of the canonical text.

⁷⁵ The list of detailed points, “Questions for Uncovering the Message of a Biblical Text” by Moshe Greenberg, is unpublished and printed here with the permission of Professor Greenberg; it was translated by Jeffrey H. Tigay. The full list is as follows:

1. What are the boundaries of the unit? Are there opening and closing formulas? Any structure that maintains its unity? Contents or linguistic usages that unify it?
2. To what extent are the components of the unit connected to each other? How are they connected?

determine the boundaries of a unit. Analysis of an entire text for assonance, rhyme, paronomasia, chiasm, contrast of opposites, images, and the relationship of repetitions to the original presentation of the element helps the reader to discern the author's strategy.

A checklist of 'what to look for' can be found in Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, as well as in the list of questions prepared by Moshe Greenberg.⁷⁶ Alter, for example, notes the use of fine modifications from moment to moment; careful choices of words and reported details, changes in the pace of the narration, small movements of dialogue, networks of ramified interconnections, intentionality of the analogies among stories when supported by linguistic connections, the artful use of language, and the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, and compositional units.

It must be noted that many of these artistic devices are not inherently closural. They can be found throughout a narrative and not only in end-sections. They *are* closural, however, *if* they reflect changes in the narrative or make a final emphatic point. Then the devices can provide "the author's last word on his subject," as Gottlieb explains, and they strategically emphasize, entertain, and edify (in the sense of instruct).⁷⁷ The ways in which they do this are demonstrated in subsequent chapters.

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3. Regularity or irregularity—in grammar (unusual forms?), vocabulary (rare? unique?), length of sentences (equal or not?).
 4. If the ideational continuity is incomplete, is there some other basis for the juxtaposition of the parts (verbal connection, some other external connection)?
 5. In addition to the plain sense of the passage, what other things that make an impression, or other message-bearers, exist (assonance? rhyme? paronomasia? chiasm? contrast of opposites? images?). What do these strategies direct one's attention to?
 6. If there are repetitions, are they literal and exact? If there are variations, what is their meaning?
 7. Do the components or topics recur elsewhere? In which book? In the Bible? Outside the Bible? In the same form or a different one? Are there signs of borrowing or imitation?
 8. To what extent does my understanding correspond to the understanding of other readers (translations, commentators)? If there are differences, what are they due to?
- Elements that refuse to be integrated in the picture are liable to be interpolations or corruptions. If they are interpolations—for what purpose were they added? If corruptions—how did they take place? (Reasoned suggestions for emendation; how did the corruption develop from the proposed original text?)

⁷⁶ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 3–12. Alter describes "literary art [that is] finely modulated from moment to moment, 3. He also makes note of the ending formulas compiled by Shimon Bar-Ephrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 142–143.

⁷⁷ Isaac B. Gottlieb, "Sof Davar: Biblical Endings." *Prooftexts* 11 (1991), 213.

2.4.2. *Shimon Bar-Ephrat and Closing Formulas*

Building on the work of I. L. Seeligmann, Shimon Bar-Ephrat compiled a list of closing formulas.⁷⁸ The motifs he notes are: a person returns home (if the reader had been told he had left home and went elsewhere); a person is sent off (or a combination of being sent off and leaving); people or a group who met during the course of the narrative separate again or the protagonist dies. In the Genesis narratives discussed so far, most have concluded with a departure: Adam and Eve are sent off by God from the Garden of Eden (Gen 2–3); Cain is sent off by God and settles in Nod (Gen 4); and Abraham, after arriving in Canaan and building altars in two specific places, wanders ‘off-stage’ as he continues his travels in Canaan (Gen 12:1–9). The prevalence of this and other types of closing formulas, and the language that accompanies them, is documented in Chapter 4.

2.4.3. *Aharon Mirsky and Modified Syntax*

A few biblical scholars have written specifically about endings. Aharon Mirsky noted that a pattern change in the last unit, which he found in some biblical poetry, rhetoric, and narrative, is “a stylistic device for indicating conclusion.”⁷⁹ These changes also have a “reinforcing and aesthetic value.” Mirsky presumed that the original form of the texts was oral; a modified syntax would alert the listener that the end was at hand.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Shimon Bar-Ephrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 130–132. Bar-Ephrat attributes some of his data to I. L. Seeligmann’s “Hebraische Erzählung und biblische Geschichtsschreibung,” in *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 18 (1962), 305–325.

⁷⁹ Aharon Mirsky, “Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew,” *Semitics* 5 (1977): 9–23. The example that Mirsky presents for narrative, Gen 23, he attributes to Rabbi Mordechai Breuer, 21.

⁸⁰ Evidence of orality in early Greek hexameter poetry is supported by Adrian Kelly in “How to End an Orally-Derived Epic Poem,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 137 (2007), 371–402. She finds that doublet structure marks a consistent strategy of closure. In biblical scholarship, however, orality of the texts remains an open question. Everett Fox writes that there is simply not enough formal evidence to presume an oral basis, and it is difficult to conclusively prove on purely formal grounds how much of the Hebrew text originated in oral recitation. He writes in “The Book in its Contexts,” p. xx, his introduction to the translation of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig’s *Scripture and Translation*, “The problem of course is that we simply do not possess enough evidence to support the idea that the Bible is an oral document in the same sense as the epic poems of Homer (or those of other cultures). Earlier attempts to fit the Bible into an epic or even rhythmic scheme have largely failed or remained unproven.” Here, Fox is referring to Jan Vansima’s *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, and Robert Culley’s “Oral Tradition and Old Testament Studies,” *Semeia* 5 (1976). The Bible itself is of little help in answering the question, since it portrays instances of writing alongside the recitation of poetry and song in various periods.

The example Mirsky gives from narrative comes from within the dialogue portion of Gen 23, as Abraham negotiates with the people of the land to purchase a burial plot for Sarah. In verses 6 and 11, the words in the phrase “bury (or burying) your dead” are written in Hebrew in the following order, first “bury” (*q.b.r.*), followed by “your dead” (*metkha*). In verse 15, which completes the dialogue, the order of these two words is reversed, “your dead, bury” (*metkha q.b.r.*).

Although the oral source of this pattern in writing is conjectural, and in this case the changes do not occur at the end of the narrative but at the end of the embedded dialogue, modifications in language and syntax at the end mark other biblical narrative endings. An example is the repetition of the verb “to do” (*ʿ.ś.h*) in the first creation story, where all the forms reflect actions conjugated in the perfect, imperfect, or cohortative—except for the last time the verb is used (Gen 1–2:4a). There the final word, *laʿasot*, functions as a gerund, meaning “by doing (such and such)” (Gen 2:3). *Laʿasot* gives more details about the preceding action: “He ceased all his work which God had created *by doing*” is more informative than “all his work which he had *done* by creating.”⁸¹ Further discussion about linguistic changes is included in Chapter 4.

2.4.4. Isaac B. Gottlieb and the Ends of Biblical Books

Isaac Gottlieb found signals that send a message that a biblical book is ending. When comparing their endings, he noted that books conclude with certain formulaic or literary motifs or with a combination of the two.⁸² One formulaic motif he found is the use of words that mean “conclusion”; these include the death of a major character or the conclusion of a major event in history. Gottlieb’s categories for ends of biblical books are applicable to some of the brief narratives in this study. Words that mean conclusion (which he termed “formulaic”) are in the end-section of the creation story in Gen 1–2. There the verbs “to be complete” (*k.l.h*) (Gen 2:1, 2) and “to cease” (*ś.b.t*) (Gen 2:2, 3) can be considered a signal:

⁸¹ Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 437–438 (§124 o, n.2).

⁸² Gottlieb, “*Sof Davar*” 213–224, applies the term “formulaic” to words that mean “conclusion.” Gottlieb does not indicate where an end-section begins. In a more recent article, “From Formula to Expression in Hebrew and Aramaic Texts,” *JANES* 31, 47–62, he traces fixed, formulaic terms at the endings of the books of Jeremiah, Daniel, and Esther to their origins in different contexts, such as in letters or legal documents. I build upon Gottlieb’s observations in Chapter 4.

just as all the work that [God] had been doing was complete and God ceased doing it, so the narrative itself is complete.

Gottlieb also noted a thematic category for ending a biblical book, that is, the “conclusion of a major event in history.” This motif corresponds to recurrent themes in the short narratives. In the end-section of the brief Deuteronomy recitation of the history of Israel (Deut 26:5*b*–10*a*; see Chapter 1), Moses recalls the event in which God freed the people from bondage. For the Genesis narratives in this study, however, the stories are told on a personal scale, and the motifs also operate on a personal scale (although that does not prevent readers, and the writers, from attributing greater significance to some of the outcomes).⁸³ As one example, the major event at the end of the Adam and Eve story is that they are expelled from the Garden of Eden and will henceforth live outside the Garden. Similarly, the narrative of Abraham’s purchase of a burial site in Canaan is presented as having personal significance for Abraham (Gen 23). Jacob’s acquisition of the birthright marks him personally as the patriarch who will receive the blessings that had been given by God to Abraham and Isaac (25:19–34).

Gottlieb also notes that in the endings of biblical books key words recur, and sometimes alliteration in those words reinforces them. He notes the use in particular of the key word “to return” (*š.w.b*), which, he points out, is appropriate for an ending because conceptually the return to the beginning “completes the form . . . and is the essence of art.”⁸⁴ Gottlieb suggests that words such as “to return” (*š.w.b*) or “to be complete” (*k.l.h*) convey a double message: “one inside the work and bound by its illusions, the other external and authorial.”⁸⁵ The presence of words phonetically close to “to return” (*š.w.b*) reiterates the sound and reinforces the meaning of the key word in some of his examples.⁸⁶

⁸³ The importance of Abraham’s purchase of land in Canaan near Hebron, for example, seems significant beyond an individual’s purchase of a burial site, based on the narrator’s repetitions that support the legality of the transaction. Abraham is the patriarch of Israel, and his purchase signifies the initial positioning of Israel in Canaan, to which the people will return after exile (whether it be from Egypt or Babylon).

⁸⁴ Gottlieb, “*Sof Davar*,” 219, attributes the connection of closing with the motif of returning to Thomas S. Kane and Leonard J. Peters, eds, *Writing Prose: Techniques and Purposes*, 257.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 217. Gottlieb also considers but ultimately rejects the proposition that the use of “to return” (*š.w.b*) is related to the historical Period of Restoration.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

In end-sections of the Genesis narratives there are numerous examples of this key word, “to return” (*š.w.b*).⁸⁷ For example, God tells Adam that his punishment will include the need to work hard once he is out of Eden. The final words in this part of the end-section, in Gen 3:19, are:

By the sweat of your brow
 Shall you get bread to eat,
 Until you “return” (*š.w.b*) to the ground—
 For from it you were taken.
 For dust you are,
 And to dust you shall “return” (*š.w.b*)

Among the many other examples of “return” (*š.w.b*) in these narratives, there are also instances where that verb is reinforced with the alliterative “to remain, to stay” (*y.š.b*).⁸⁸

2.4.5. Adele Berlin and “Time-Bridges”

Adele Berlin uses the term “time-bridge” to describe a particular type of device that signals the end. She explains that when a biblical writer wishes to cut off his narrative and “wants to let his audience know that the story is finished,” he may bring the narrative to some future time beyond the time of the plot, closer to the time of the audience.⁸⁹ Her example is from the Book of Ruth, in which time is advanced at the end by linking the child who is born to Ruth within the time frame of the narrative into the future time of King David. Gottlieb attests to the presence of time-shifts at the ends of many other books of the Bible.⁹⁰

A time-shift, discussed above in conjunction with Eichenbaum’s study, which demonstrated it as a recurring quality of epilogues, is a common ending technique in the Genesis narratives.⁹¹ A time-shift is frequently found in conjunction with etiologies, since logically the etiology explains

⁸⁷ Other examples include: Gen 15:16, 16:9, 18:14 (which partially repeats 18:10), 21:32, 22:19 (which forms a frame with 22:5), 26:18; 27:44, 45; 28:21, 33:16. See also the chart, “*y.š.b* (to remain, dwell) and *š.w.b* (turn back, return)” in Chapter 4.

⁸⁸ Gen 21:34 and Gen 22:19b.

⁸⁹ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 107–110.

⁹⁰ Gottlieb, “*Sof Davar*,” 216. Regarding time-shift and how it can frame a narrative at its conclusion, Gottlieb credits the work of Boris Uspensky, which can be found in *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, 149.

⁹¹ The role of epilogues, which is discussed by Boris M. Eichenbaum in “O. Henry and the Theory of the Short Story,” 232, is presented above in the discussion of his influence on the Kafalenos paradigm.

something that the reader is expected to be familiar with at a time after the narrative action has concluded. In addition to simply being a marker, this strategy of the author forms a new connection to the reader of a narrative, one that draws the reader into the events that have occurred. In the fanciful narrative in Gen 19:30–38, Lot's new family is established with his daughters, who each give birth to a son through Lot. At the end of the narrative, the sons are identified with peoples about whom the reader is presumed to know “until today” (*‘ad hayom*)—the Moabites and the Ammonites. Etiologies and other forms that include time-shifts are clausal devices and are discussed in Chapter 4.

2.5. *The Documentary Sources*

The concept of the historical development of the biblical text is generally accepted in biblical academic circles. Since it was first posited more than 200 years ago, many of the questions regarding discrepancies in language, terminology, information, and ideas in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, have been accounted for by the documentary hypothesis, which explains that the Pentateuch was formed from many documents that were combined and edited over many years.⁹² The principal source documents in the Pentateuch are known as J, E, D, and P.

However, in the world of literary analysis of biblical narratives there is some equivocation regarding the use of this information. A search for the principles, or poetics, of biblical narrative has led some scholars to the conclusion that poetics can explain almost all the literary and conceptual differences in a text. Therefore, they reject the use of diachronic

⁹² Alternative models of the process of the development of the Pentateuch have been proposed. Carr's *Reading the Fractures of Genesis* builds on the “chorale” image suggested by Levinson; his diachronic investigations are linked with the doublets and breakers he has mapped in the synchronic reading of Genesis. As far as the development of the text, Carr argues that the P-source was originally separate but not independent; it was written in constant relation to non-P material and designed to stand separate from and against it; some non-P texts were then secondarily modified to conform to P models. He demonstrates this in some verses of the Flood narrative. A less P-centric approach that also sees interpretive additions is known as the “supplementary hypothesis.” Tzemah Yoreh in *The First Book of God* follows this approach, building on the work of Robert Polzin and Bernard Levinson, which has accumulated data through inner-biblical interpretation. Joel Baden's *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch* posits that the different sources remained independent (including J and E), each representing a segment of society that had a different viewpoint and that they were brought together at the time of Ezra.

study and adopt a synchronic approach, using only the final canonical biblical text.⁹³ Meir Sternberg, for example, argues that repetitions have a purpose *everywhere* and should be analyzed as poetics.⁹⁴ One can and should, he says, determine the meaning and coherence of the text through synchronistic examination.⁹⁵ Sternberg is adept at using the techniques of modern literary theory in his analyses, but those theories and techniques were developed under the assumption that the texts under scrutiny were written by a single author. Adele Berlin states that “poetic interpretation is a synchronic approach to the text”; knowledge of poetics “prevents the mistaking of certain features of the present text’s discourse for evidence of earlier sources.”⁹⁶

Biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies have confirmed the value of diachronic analysis of texts. The study by Jeffrey Tigay of the evolution of the Gilgamesh epic in ancient Mesopotamia provides a model for utilizing the documentary hypothesis and source-critical methods for the Bible.⁹⁷ Other fine examples include Moshe Greenberg’s analysis of the plague

⁹³ The term “synchronic” comes from linguistics, where it pertains to a method that was concerned with the state of a language at one time, past or present. A synchronic study related to the Bible examines the biblical text as it stands in its final form, as it was canonized. The opposing term, “diachronic,” also comes from linguistics, where diachronic study of language is concerned with the historical development of a language. Diachronic study of biblical texts takes into account the hypothesis that the canonical version is comprised of various sources that were brought together over time. This hypothesis has been developed and refined for 200 years and is accepted by most academic biblical scholars. Some scholars who accept this hypothesis, including Adele Berlin, *Poetics*, 109–110, tend to lessen its importance when they focus on the poetics of the text.

⁹⁴ Bernard M. Levinson critiques Sternberg’s methodology in “The Right Choral: From the Poetics to the Hermeneutics of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Not in Heaven*, 134. In his article, Levinson demonstrates the value that diachronic analysis can offer to interpretation of narrative (the Flood story) and to legal texts in the Bible. Françoise Mirguet, in her SBL ’07 Abstract (and her 2009, *La Représentation du Divin dans les Récits du Pentateuque: Médiations Syntaxiques et Narratives*, published by Brill), reconsiders Sternberg’s affirmation that the biblical innovation of the omniscient narrator reflects the characterization of God.

⁹⁵ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Literature: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Although Sternberg’s perceptive reading of the biblical text and awareness of literary theory is significant, his methodology ignores some basic historical scholarship.

Yairah Amit in “The Repeated Situation: A Poetic Principle in the Modeling of the Joseph Narrative,” suggests that repetition is a poetic principle whose source can be found in Gen 41:32. There Joseph explains how he comes to understand the meaning of Pharaoh’s two dreams: “As for Pharaoh having had the same dream twice, *it means* that the matter has been determined by God, and that God will soon carry it out.”

⁹⁶ Berlin, *Poetics*, 20–21.

⁹⁷ Jeffrey H. Tigay, “The Evolution of the Pentateuchal Narratives in the Light of the Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic,” in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*. In his discussion of the Sumerian texts about Gilgamesh, Tigay writes, “The point to keep in mind is that

narrative in Exodus, Bernard Levinson's analysis of the Flood narrative, Baruch Schwartz's delineation of the priestly account of the revelation at Sinai, and Robert Alter's delineation of the J and E versions of the Joseph story in Gen 42.⁹⁸ In each of these the documentary sources, diachronically revealed, provide insight into their own values and poetics; the combined texts disclose the values, conventions, and poetics of the editors. I use historical-critical scholarship in my analysis of the narratives in this study. Occasionally this reveals the values of the editor/redactor, as well as those of the component authors, as a narrative is brought to a conclusion.

Narrative poetics does not need to eschew source criticism, and in fact source criticism can make narrative poetics more relevant to current biblical study.

2.5.1. *J and P Endings in the Flood Story: Gen 6–9*

The Flood story is an example of how a narrative formed by combining two separate narratives maintains two separate end-sections, which were left in place by the editor or redactor.⁹⁹ The two main sources are the P-source and the J-source. The end-section of each resolves issues raised in the opening verses of its narrative.¹⁰⁰ In the first part of the P-source, God tells Noah he will make a covenant with him and with his family (Gen 6:18), and the covenant is established in the end-section, in 9:8–17. In the J-source, a thematic A-B-C structure at the beginning is balanced with an intertwined C'-B'-A' structure at the end: A and A' (6:5–6 and 8:21a) relate to the nature of man, B and B', to God's decision to destroy mankind (6:7 and 8:21–22), and C and C', to Noah the individual (6:8 and 8:20).

they must have had a meaning and function of their own and these were not necessarily identical to those of the Akkadian epic," 32.

⁹⁸ Moshe Greenberg, "The Redaction of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, 243–252; Bernard Levinson, "The Right Chorale" in *Not in Heaven*, 129–153; Baruch Schwartz, "The Priestly Account of the Theophany and Lawgiving at Sinai," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, 103–134; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 137–141.

⁹⁹ The last section of the J-source is Gen 8:20–22; the last section of the P-source is Gen 9:1–12. Richard Elliott Friedman's *The Bible with Sources Revealed* prints each source (J, P, Redactor [R], and Other [O]) in a different color or font type. The sources are identified as follows:

J: Gen 6:5–8; 7:1–5, 7, 16b–20, 22–23; 8:2b–3, 6, 8–12, 13b, 20–22.

P: Gen 6:9b–22; 7:8–16, 21, 24; 8:1–2a 3b–5, 7, 13a, 14–19; 9:1–17.

R: Gen 6:9.

O: Gen 7:6.

¹⁰⁰ In subsequent chapters I show how the end-section in each source, while reflecting its own worldview, uses multiple ending devices to stabilize and finalize its narrative.

2.5.2. *Effect of a Source Insertion on the Next Narrative's End: Gen 12*

Sometimes a source-insertion in one narrative can affect the end of a different narrative. In the story of Abraham's arrival in Canaan (Gen 12:1–9), a P-insertion into that J-source narrative affects the end of the next story. The verses that are inserted (12:4, 5) state that Abraham was wealthy when he left home for Canaan (and therefore would have been wealthy when he journeyed down to Egypt with his wife, Sarah, in the next narrative). The J-source does not discuss his wealth at all. This "fact" in the P-source is emphasized by the double use of the root *r.k. š*, "to collect or gather property, or [nominally] property or goods." These are the inserted verses:

Abram¹⁰¹ was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the wealth (*rekušam*) that they had amassed (*rakašu*), and the persons they had acquired in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in the land of Canaan,¹⁰²

The motif of Abraham's wealth found in these P-source verses does not have a literary function in the narrative into which it is inserted, and it is never mentioned again in the story.

The next narrative (Gen 12:10–20) is all J-source, but the inserted words from the prior narrative affect it. In this second Abraham story he becomes wealthy in Egypt because Pharaoh seized his wife, Sarah, whom Pharaoh thinks is Abraham's sister. As a result, Abraham finally (according to this J-source) acquires great wealth:

Because of her, it went well with Abram; he acquired sheep, oxen, asses, male and female slaves, she-asses, and camels (12:16).

The reappearance of the motif suggests that the theme of acquiring wealth is important to this J-source author. As the narrative progresses Pharaoh learns that Sarah is Abraham's wife and he abruptly commands, "Take her and begone!" (12:19). Then Pharaoh puts men in charge of Abraham, and a final point is made that Abraham took "all that he possessed" with him and, "they sent him off with his wife *and all that he possessed*." (20b).¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ In Genesis, the name Abraham is originally "Abram:" it is changed to Abraham in Gen 17 in the context of the covenant and circumcision.

¹⁰² Richard Elliott Friedman, *Sources Revealed*, 50. Within these two verses, Friedman attributes two Hebrew words *meḥaran* and *biḥaran* ('from Haran' and 'in Haran') to a later redactor.

¹⁰³ The J-source motif of Abraham's wealth reappears at the beginning of the next narrative (Gen 13:1–18) and forms the basis on which *that* story is built.

When Gen 12:10–20 is read in its present context, however, the residual effect of the P verses from the prior story lessens the foreign king's role in contributing to Abraham's wealth—the reader has the impression that Abraham had wealth before he went to Egypt (Gen 12:4a–5). By incorporating the P verses in Gen 12:1–9, the editor or redactor limited Pharaoh's role in creating Abraham's wealth.¹⁰⁴

Why did an editor insert the P-source concept of how Abraham acquired his wealth into the first of these J-source stories? Perhaps it was merely that the P-source document had a different understanding of how Abraham initially acquired his wealth, and the editor felt that this information should be included. One could speculate that this information 'sanitized' the wealth that Abraham had, since only a portion of it then would have been acquired through Sarah and a foreign king. These are interesting questions, but the point here is to demonstrate how a source insertion affects the reader's understanding of events at the end of a narrative.

2.5.3. *Addition of an Altar Ritual to a P-Source Narrative: Gen 35:9–15*

In the P-source version of Jacob's return to the land after his sojourn with Laban, a ritual in the end-section may be an editorial insertion from the

From Egypt, Abram went up into the Negeb, with his wife and all that he possessed, together with Lot. (13:1).

In both narratives (Gen 12:10–20 and 13:1–18), the language of the motif is "and all that he possessed (*we'et-kol-ašer-lo*)" (Gen 12:20 and Gen 13:1). In the second narrative, Abraham's wealth is specified as "cattle, silver, and gold," and Lot's is "flocks and herds and tents." The silver and gold of Abraham may refer to what he amassed in Egypt.

Ibn Ezra, commenting on Gen 12:5, noted the similarity between the use of *rekušam*, which he says refers to their cattle (*mikneh*) and includes cows, sheep, asses, and camels, and the conditions noted in Gen 13, when Lot and Abraham separate because "the land was not able to bear them, for their *rekusham* was great."

¹⁰⁴ Nahum Sarna, in *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 90, suggests that the "wealth" of Abraham (12:5a) is "mentioned in anticipation of the ensuing narrative (v.16)" in order to show that "Abram's affluence does not derive from Pharaoh's gift." Sarna's observation is cogent, and he does not attribute this observation to other sources, nor have I found any. Sarna does not note that this effect was likely brought about by someone who edited or redacted the J-source story; source-critical scholarship supports this. An explanation of Sarna's approach can be seen in "The Anticipatory Use of Information as a Literary Feature of the Genesis Narratives," in *Studies in Biblical Interpretation*, 211–220, in which he suggests that there is a biblical phenomenon in which certain information "which is extraneous to the immediate context" may be suddenly introduced into the biblical text. That information is "later seen to be crucial to the understanding of a subsequent episode or theme," 21). In Gen 12:1–9, however, the information comes from a separate source; the introduction of that information should be understood as a later redactor's decision to change readers' perception of the origins of the patriarch's wealth so that it reflects his own beliefs or understanding.

E documentary source.¹⁰⁵ Rituals are a common signal that a narrative is finished.¹⁰⁶ In the story God appears to Jacob, changes his name from Jacob to Israel, and promises to give him the land and descendants that he had earlier promised to Abraham and Isaac. In verse 14, God departs, and “Jacob set up a pillar at the site . . . a pillar of stone, and he offered a libation on it and poured oil on it.” The ritual of raising a pillar to God and offering a libation is paralleled in other E-source stories about Jacob. The story then resumes its P-source narration. The site where God appeared is named Bethel.

Now that I have described the methods I use to examine the literary and thematic elements in these narratives and the techniques for analysis of their structures, I can demonstrate, in the next four chapters, specific types of thematic, linguistic, and formal closural elements found in the Genesis narratives. In the first of these chapters the topic is repetition, an underlying literary principle in biblical prose. Repetition does not always lead to closure, but when it appears in the end-sections of a narrative it can be a powerful closural device.

¹⁰⁵ The question of whether verse 14 of Gen 35:9–15 is from the E or P documentary source has not been resolved. Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 201, defines it as E, as does Baruch Schwartz. Other narratives or verses in which Jacob raises a pillar and offers a libation are from the E documentary source: Gen 28:18, 31:45; 35:20. However, Richard Elliott Friedman, *Sources Revealed*, 90, and David Carr, *Reading the Fractures*, disagree. Carr, 89, n. 24, argues that libation offerings do not necessarily contradict P’s theology since they are not animal offerings and thus are not among the offerings that require a temple.

¹⁰⁶ A full discussion of the role of rituals in end-sections is found in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER THREE

REPETITION

3.1. *Introduction*

At the end of the J-source Flood narrative, God twice promises that he will not again destroy the earth (Gen 8:20–22). At the end of the P-source Flood narrative the word “covenant” (*brit*) is repeated seven times. The key word “earth” (*’adamah*) repeats in the end-section of the Adam and Eve story (Gen 2–3), as does the verb “to hear” (*s.m.h*) after Abraham has purchased a burial site (Gen 23). The first and last verses of the Tower of Babel story repeat the words “language” and “all the earth” (*safah* and *kol-ha’areš*). In the Noah narrative that follows the Flood, Noah’s curses his son Ham (Canaan) three times at the end (Gen 9:25–27). In the first Abraham story, after Abraham arrives in Canaan, he builds first one and then a second altar (Gen 12:7, 8). Each of these repetitions in word or action in the end-section of its narrative contributes to closure. The closure may be on the level of the plot and the action of the story or it may be on the discourse level, where key words, motifs, or forms are directed to readers.¹ In this chapter I demonstrate how repetitions such as these contribute finality, stability, integrity, and a sense of unity to their narratives.

Biblical scholars have described the important role that repetition plays in biblical prose. Robert Alter, for example, has shown how biblical narrative employs “an elaborately integrated system of repetitions.”² Yet, of the many parts that repetition plays in a narrative, its role in helping to bring a narrative to a close has not been explained. In this chapter I briefly describe the contributions that biblical scholars have made toward understanding the role of repetition in biblical narratives (Section 3.2), discuss the nature of repetition (Sections 3.3 and 3.4), and then demonstrate how specific repetitions in the end-sections of the Genesis

¹ The term “discourse” is defined by Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, 21, as the *expression* plane of a narrative, as opposed to its *content* plane, that is, the “how” of a narrative as opposed to the “what.”

² Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 97 and 88–113. Other repetitions may extend beyond the narrative itself, creating connections with earlier or later stories.

narratives contribute to closure (Section 3.5). A brief summary closes the chapter (Section 3.6).

3.2. *Repetition in Biblical Narrative*

Robert Alter and Meir Sternberg have shown that repetitions in biblical prose were deliberate and not just a function of the biblical narrative genre. Sternberg compared biblical prose with the stories presented in Ugaritic epic poetry and demonstrated that biblical prose was not dependent on formulaic convention.³ He suggests that repetition functioned creatively to dramatize tensions, highlight equivalences, and smooth transitions.⁴ Alter points out that although the biblical writers were working within the demands of their tradition, repetition was a choice for analysis, for foreshadowing, or for thematic assertion. Repetition, he says, was a

³ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Literature: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, 368–370, asks this question of biblical literature: Is repetition a formulaic convention or a functional principle? He responds emphatically that it is deliberate and functional, that is, it is not a redundancy at all. “The text has devised a redundancy on some level with an eye to a definite effect; that is, in order to impel the reader to transfer it to another level (pattern, context, framework) where it will duly fall into place,” 369. As proof he lists aspects of the text, including the reticence of biblical narrative, the ubiquity of informational gaps, miniature scale, and reign of economy. These do not accord with a wasteful handling of the structure of repetition. Hence, he says, they make a *prima facie* case for a functional approach. Sternberg does not discuss the repetitions that can be attributed to multiple sources in a narrative.

For other literatures of the ancient Near East some scholars have demonstrated that repetitions create parallelism and wordplay. Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 15, explains that repetition was used in that literature to develop details, to add subjective elements, and to stress dramatic scenes (typically in spoken, then narrated versions of the same passage).

In “Alliterative Allusions, Rebus Writing, and Paronomastic Punishment: Some Aspects of Word Play in Akkadian Literature,” Victor A. Hurowitz identifies words that are repeated in both halves of a protasis-apodosis sentence in omen lists and legal codes. For biblical examples that relate to Hurowitz’s discussion of repeated words with different connotations see Section 3.5.1 and note 44.

Gary Rendsburg’s “Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor” shows how repetition and wordplay in that Egyptian story bring about rhetorical effects, establish alliteration, and may heighten the sense of “cyclic completion.”

Dalia Abo Haggag, in a recent doctoral dissertation for the University of Pennsylvania, uses methodologies typically employed for studying biblical forms to examine some *sūras* in the Qur’ān. She shows that repetition organizes verses of the text, forms structures that impart additional meanings, and emphasizes messages. In two stories, parallel symmetry underscores the similarities between the events, 119–120. Also see *Repetition: A Key to Qur’ānic Style, Structure and Meaning*, 1.

⁴ Sternberg, *Poetics*, 416.

method to provide moral or psychological commentary or to confirm an underlying view of historical causality, the latter indicated by command or prophecy and fulfillment.⁵ He notes that key words, motifs, themes, sequences of actions, and type-scenes regularly repeat in the stories.⁶ Alter argues that in biblical prose, more so than in other narrative traditions, the reiteration of key words was formalized into a “prominent convention.”⁷ Alter acknowledges the influential scholarship of Bruce F. Kavin, who used examples ranging from the Bible to Shakespeare’s *King Lear* to modern literature and film to demonstrate that “through the repetition of key words and images” we become aware “not simply of the differences between characters but [of] all the complex interrelations and implications” between themes in a work.⁸

3.3. *Repetition: What It Is and Why It Works*

3.3.1. *Repetition Defined*

Repetition occurs “when a word, precept, or experience is repeated with equal or greater force at each occurrence.”⁹ This definition, by Kavin, highlights the constructive and deliberative nature of biblical repetitions, especially when compared with the word “repetitious.” The latter term suggests repeating something “with less impact at each recurrence,” something not moving toward a particular end or goal. In those cases, it appears that the writer uses a repeat “out of a failure of convention or sloppiness of thought.”¹⁰ Kavin indicates that the concept of repetition in the positive sense—and this describes its use in the Genesis narratives—includes the likelihood that what is repeated may be somewhat different from the original. This could be because of actual changes in words or syntax, or it could simply be the result of its context: the repeated item is

⁵ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 88–112.

⁶ Ibid., 95–97. The difference between a motif and a theme is that a motif is concrete when compared to a theme; it may relate to form, giving formal coherence, or it may be symbolic, 95. Although motifs are a type of repetition found in all kinds of literature, in biblical narrative they are intricately “bound up” with the story, 79.

⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁸ Bruce F. Kavin, *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film*, 54–55. Kavin also shows how various words that are repeated in different contexts carry the meanings acquired in earlier contexts into their present and future contexts and he notes repetitions of parallel plots and of certain kinds of confrontations, 58.

⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

in a new place and therefore appears to be somewhat different because of the new context.

3.3.2. *Precision*

The repetition does not have to be precise to be effective, especially for conceptual points. Brent Strawn brings as evidence the results of Julie Duncan's analysis of some of the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹¹ He notes that the "alternative, slightly expanded readings" that Duncan found in passages of Deuteronomy in the Dead Sea Scrolls could be attributed to the work of a scribe who was "copying by memory and being influenced by other, closely similar passages." Strawn suggests that the "muddled" repetition, as he terms it, "complicates memory while simultaneously producing a sharpened focus for concepts that are closely similar and frequently repeated." A reader/listener, Strawn observes, would not necessarily be aware of slight differences in a text; the mere fact of repetition, even if muddled, is effective.¹²

3.3.3. *Time*

Repetitions with subtle differences in narrative or performance take place in time. Kawin explains that during this process the writer/artist interacts with the reader, whose focus and intelligence the artist respects.¹³ The writer/artist manipulates repetitions to create structure and forms that resonate with the reader:

[A]rtists . . . repeat something *now* to make you remember something *then* and set you up for something that is coming *later*; [they] build one use of a word on top of another; . . . draw contrasts and assume you will *remember* how a word was used last and will draw your own conclusions from the difference of context; [they] *emphasize*. Their art is primarily one of repetition with variation.¹⁴

¹¹ Brent A. Strawn, "Keep/Observe/Do—Carefully—Today! The Rhetoric of Repetition in Deuteronomy," 232–233 and n. 92, citing J. Duncan, "Considerations of 4 QDt in the Light of the 'All Souls Deuteronomy' and Cave 4 Phylactery Texts," in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid 18–21 March 1991*, vol. 1, edited by Julio Trebolle Barrera and Luis Vegas Montaner. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992, 199–215; and idem, "Excerpted Texts of Deuteronomy at Qumran," *RevQ* 18 (1997), 43–62.

¹² *Ibid.*, 232.

¹³ Kawin, *Telling It Again*, 7, 35.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34–35. In music, repetition and variations occur over the course of time with varying effects on the listener. In an interview in the *New York Times*, April 18, 2011, "To

The relatively brief time that it takes to read these Genesis narratives lends itself to readers' awareness of many types of subtle changes. The reader can remember the first mention of a key word, which, in the course of just ten or twelve verses, is repeated and then subtly changed as it becomes nuanced to reflect the changes that have occurred in the story (see Section 3.5.1*b*).

3.4. *How Repetitions Contribute to Closure*

3.4.1. *Truthfulness and the Integrity of the Narrative*

For many types of literature, repetition can contribute to readers' perception of the truth and integrity of a narrative. Barbara Herrnstein Smith describes how in poetry, for example, when an utterance is repeated the second instance confirms our experience of the first, making that first occurrence more valid and lending a "sense of truth," which the reader experiences as "conclusiveness."¹⁵ Lewis Carroll plays with this idea in his whimsical poem, "The Hunting of the Snark."¹⁶ In the poem, the Bellman urges his motley crew to disembark and find the elusive snark. He urges

Tug Hearts, Music First Must Tickle the Neurons," by Pam Belluck, the cellist Yo-Yo Ma describes a 12-minute sonata featuring a four-note melody that recurs several times. On the final repetition, the melody expands to six notes. "If I set it up right," Mr. Ma said in an interview, "that is when the sun comes out. It's like you've been under a cloud, and then you are looking once again at the vista and then the light is shining on the whole valley." But that happens only if he is restrained enough to save some exuberance and emphasis for that moment, so that by the time listeners see that musical sun they have not already "been to a disco and its light show" and been "blinded by cars driving at night with the headlights in your eyes . . . It's deviation from a pattern," Mr. Ma said. "A surprise is only a surprise when you know it departs from something." In the same article the musician Paul Simon is quoted: "The stopping of sounds and rhythms, . . . it's really important, because, you know, how can I miss you unless you're gone? If you just keep the thing going like a loop, eventually it loses its power."

¹⁵ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure, A Study of How Poems End*, 156.

¹⁶ In Lewis Carroll's "The Hunting of the Snark," 11, the Bellman's three repetitions finally convince the motley crew of sailors to go ashore to look for the Snark:

"Just the place for a Snark!" the Bellman cried,
As he landed his crew with care;
Supporting each man on the top of the tide
By a finger entwined in his hair.
"Just the place for a Snark! I have said it twice:
That alone should encourage the crew.
Just the place for a Snark! I have said it thrice:
What I tell you three times is true."

This excerpt is from "Fit the First" in the poem. B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 156, quotes from a different section of "The Hunting of the Snark," that is, from "Fit the Fifth."

them again and again, finally saying in exasperation, “What I tell you three times is true.” If something is repeated, the characters will accept it, and sometimes this will be effective for readers as well.

This notion can be demonstrated in some of the Genesis narratives. In Gen 18:15, for example, there are two announcements that state that Abraham and Sarah will have a son in their old age (discussed in Section 3.5.2a).

Kawin suggests that from the artist’s point of view saying essentially the same thing a second time effects a more truthful expression of what the artist wishes to convey. In this way repetition can “strengthen the reality of [an] experience”:¹⁷

Emphasis [through repetition] is nearly always expressive of [the artist’s] frustration at the inadequacy of the simple statement to convey experience—that is, to give one the sense of having *experienced the truth*. We can only hint at what we cannot say—can only emphasize until emphasis itself communicates.¹⁸ (*italics added*)

Within the Genesis narratives a nuanced understanding of a specific point is sometimes presented through a poetic repetition in the end-section. In the J-source Flood narrative, for example, repetition of God’s decision to not bring about a Flood again adds nuanced levels of finality, stability, and reassurance at the end of a narrative that has essentially described the horrifying destruction of the world (see Section 3.5.5).

3.4.2. *Natural Ending Places*

Repetitions can also be a natural sign of ending, as William Labov saw in studies of vernacular narrative. In some of his examples, repetition suspends the action of a story, indicating that it is over.¹⁹ Repetition in the Genesis narratives is closural when descriptive repetitions occur after the causal actions are over and there is a new equilibrium in a plot. Repeated statements at that point add to the stability or finality of a story as it ends; aesthetically pleasing repetitions satisfy readers who might otherwise prefer that a story continue.

¹⁷ Kawin, *Telling It Again*, 27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁹ William Labov, in *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, 379, notes the effectiveness of repetition in vernacular narrative to suspend overall action, as well as to intensify a particular action.

3.4.3. *Remembering*

In Strawn's observations about Deuteronomy he explains, "Simply put, people remember what they have heard and heard often."²⁰ In this way repetition is a didactic tool; it is especially effective when the repeated element is at the end of a work, as Aristotle noted; it is especially effective when the repeated element is at the end of a work. At the *end* of speeches, "it is appropriate" for the speaker to repeat the points he wants the listener to recall.²¹ Readers who are aware of this strategy realize that the writer has arrived at the end of his narrative.

"Most outright repetition simply aims to make us remember something, without considering whether accurate human experience is being communicated. Advertising, for example, depends almost entirely on repetition," Kawin writes. "Propaganda works the same way."²² B. H. Smith observes that in popular culture the effectiveness of repetition is demonstrated by rumor and by hard sell.²³ When we look at the repetitions in the story of Noah and the vineyard he plants, the cursing of Canaan is blatantly repeated over and over again (Section 3.5.5).

3.4.4. *Iteration: A Type of Repetition*

A variation of repetition is an "iterative" action. With an iterative action, an event occurs regularly or a series of occurrences is noted, but no details are given that would distinguish between them; if there are actions, there is no sequence to them.²⁴ In Hebrew the prefix conjugation is sometimes used to represent such a repeated general, nonspecific situation. Events occur "over and over again," even up to "the time present to the act of speaking."²⁵

²⁰ Strawn, "Keep/Observe," 232.

²¹ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 261 (1419b), noted that when one makes a speech (against another person's speech), "It is appropriate to do this [recall what has been said] at the end. For in order to be clearly understood they urge frequent repetition. . . ."

²² Kawin, *Telling It Again*, 35.

²³ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 156.

²⁴ Jean Louis Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us": *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, 14–15. Ska discusses this under the rubric "Frequency"; a more detailed discussion is found in Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 113–160, in which the terms "singular" or "singulative" narrative and "iterative" narrative are discussed. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 79, argues that the difference between "iterative" and "durative" is "the product of our understanding of the context."

²⁵ Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 31:33e, p. 506, identify this as a "habitual non-perfective" and state that this is rare in prose but

Jean Louis Ska has noted that in some instances when an iterative passage follows a singular event the contrast between the two may have a dramatic effect.²⁶ He notes as an example that in the Book of Exodus, after the end of the singular and dramatic event of the golden calf (Exod 32:1–33:23), the narrator relates a reassuring iterative event. Moses would regularly go out to the tent of meeting and the people would watch him as he entered and left (33:7–11).²⁷

In Genesis, we can see the contrast between a single and an iterative event within some of the narratives. At the end of Gen 32, the iterative (and undramatic) custom of not eating meat from the thigh muscle of an animal is explained after the singular event in which Jacob wrestles with a man or divine being (Gen 32:33).²⁸

An iterative final verse in the first Abraham narrative follows singular events: Abraham is spoken to by God, he goes to Canaan, and there he builds two altars to God (Gen 12:1–9). In the final verse, the narrator states that Abraham “journeyed by stages through the land.”²⁹ No details are given, nor is a sequence stated. The equilibrium is not changed—Abraham is still in Canaan—and in fact his action of obediently continuing his travels captures a theme of the narrative: Abraham’s continuing fulfillment of his commitment to God. This example also demonstrates that an equilibrium does not require repose, but can be simply a relatively stable condition.

3.4.5. *Frames: A Repetitive Structure*

When information that was reported or language that was used at the beginning of a narrative is repeated at the end, we have repetition that is closural almost by definition. It encloses the unit, bringing the reader back to the starting point. As a narrative device it has various names,

frequent in poetry and proverbial expressions. In addition to the example of Gen 32:33, which is discussed below, these examples are noted: Judg 7:5, יִלֶּק (*yaloq*); Exod 23:8, יַעֲוֹר (*ye’awwer*); Prov 10:1, יִשְׁמַח (*yesammakh*).

²⁶ Ska, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*,” 15.

²⁷ In Exod 33:7, the imperfect form of the verb “to take” is used: *yiqqah*. In this example, suggested by Ska, “*Our Fathers Have Told Us*,” 15, the relationship between the singular event and the iterative does not occur within one narrative but is in consecutive narratives.

²⁸ In Gen 32:33, the imperfect form of the verb “to eat” is used: *y’oklu*.

²⁹ In this example, Gen 12:9, the imperfect with waw-consecutive form of the verb “to journey” is used: *wayyissa’*.

including frame, *inclusio*, and envelope structure.³⁰ A frame helps define the beginning and end of a narrative because it contributes to the perception that the narrative has a “distinct identity,” is “whole,” and logically has “internal coherence,” as B. H. Smith noted about the effects of repetition.³¹ As readers recall the opening words (or become aware of them upon re-reading), they see that the writer is “closing the loop” or the frame is “enclosing the story.”³² The writer is completing the discourse. The example of the Tower of Babel frame noted in the introduction to this chapter, with its repetition of “language” and “all mankind,” helps define the beginning and the end of the story.

Many other narratives are framed in a similar way. The end of the P-source creation narrative in Gen 2:4a repeats terms from its opening verse (Gen 1:1)—“heaven,” “earth,” and “created” (*šamayim*, *’areš*, *bara’*). In the J-source Flood narrative words related to man’s behavior and God’s intentions are repeated at the beginning and end (Gen 6:5–7 and 8:21–2). Initially, God spoke of “man’s wickedness/evil” (*ra’at ha’adam*). After the flood is over, God accepts this quality of man, observing, “The devisings of man’s mind are evil from his youth” (*ha’adam ra’*) (Gen 8:21). God’s initial intention, that he would “blot out from the earth the men whom I created—men together with beasts, creeping things, birds of the sky . . .” is referred to at the end as God explains that “never again” would he “destroy every living being . . .” and the earth “shall not cease” (Gen 8:21–22).

³⁰ The narratological definition of “frame” is different from the literary definition that I am using here. Prince, in *A Dictionary of Narratology*, 32, defines a frame as “a set of related mental data representing various aspects of reality and enabling human perception and comprehension of these aspects. . . . More generally, narrative can be considered a frame allowing for certain kinds of organization and understandings of reality.”

³¹ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 25.

³² Chris Wyckoff, in “Have We Come Full Circle Yet? Closure, Psycholinguistics, and Problems of Recognition with the *inclusio*,” warns that this is not always so in the psalms that he studies. The perception of a frame, or *inclusio*, as he calls it, is not always evident to the reader, or it may be evident to one reader and not another. Therefore, he says, it is effective only when it is recognized as such. He draws, he explains, upon psycholinguistics to explain that some patterns are recognizable and others are less so. For example, the shorter the text, the more likely it is that a person will recognize a repeated element at the back end, 481; if more elements are repeated, recognition is easier, and the more distinctive the first part of the frame, the more recognizable the back end, 482. At times, he says, graphical and phonological similarity can override semantic meaning, and thus word-plays and puns can strengthen *inclusios*, 498. He suggests that with somewhat incomplete frames, sometimes the mind says “close enough,” 500. He concludes that the recognition of a frame is “more art than science.”

God appears to Abraham in Gen 17 and explains the covenant and circumcision, its sign.³³ That narrative is framed by references to Abraham’s age. The first words of the narrative explain that this occurred when “Abram was ninety-nine years old.” After God’s promises are made, the narrative ends with an epilogue in which Abraham circumcises himself and those in his household. Again, Abraham’s age is mentioned: “Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he circumcised the flesh of his foreskin” (Gen 17:24). The epilogue itself (Gen 17:23–27) is framed with its own

³³ Gen 17 is an example of a narrative that has very little “action.” Gerald Prince, in *A Grammar of Stories*, 24, suggests that an abstract “rule of grammar” may be helpful in defining this type of narrative. A mere three related events are enough to define a story, and thus clarify where the end-section begins. There is a first event or statement, then a second, which chronologically follows the first, and then a third, which is caused by the second. In Genesis 17, this approach is helpful. First, Abraham is old; then, God visits him and bestows a “covenant” (*brit*) upon him. The balance of the narrative involves defining, and then in an epilogue, enacting the *brit*. Other narratives that benefit from this approach are those in which the only “action” is a theophany, such as Gen 35:9–15. For this type of narrative, the Kafalenos approach can still be helpful.

The Kafalenos Paradigm for Gen 17:1–27, Covenant with Abraham

	Function	Causal steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Abraham is ninety-nine years old (and has no children).
A	<i>Destabilizing</i>	[unspoken] God has not yet established <i>brit</i> with Abraham.
C	<i>C-actant decides to get involved</i>	God offers to make <i>brit</i> , explains promises with its rules, 4–16.
D	<i>C-actant is tested (or questioned)</i>	Abraham questions God because he believes he can't have a child because he will be 100 years old and his wife 90, and he is concerned about Ishmael, 17–18.
E	<i>C-actant responds to test (or question)</i>	God explains that his wife shall bear a son, Isaac, and with him and his heirs the covenant will be maintained, 19. Ishmael will be blessed, 20.
H	<i>C-actant primary action</i>	God declares, “my covenant will be with Isaac; Sarah shall bear him . . .,” 21.
I	<i>Success (or failure) of H</i>	Abraham believes that these things will come to pass, as demonstrated by his subsequent circumcision of himself and his household (in 23–27).
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	Abraham believes he will have children.

Epilogue: Ritual enactment by Abraham, 23–27.

repetitions: “Abraham and his son Ishmael,” Abraham’s “homeborn slaves,” “slaves who were purchased,” and “circumcised.”

3.4.6. *Repetition that Does Not Lead to Closure*

Despite these examples of repetitive structures, words, and actions, repetition per se does not lead to closure.³⁴ Repetition can be an organizing principle, but that does not mean it determines the point of closure. In the P-source story of creation, repetition of each of the days of creation is an organizing principle of the story (Gen 1:1–2:4a). Day One is followed by Day Two, followed by Day Three, etc. The structure of consecutive days *organizes* the narrative but does not end it. Theoretically, the days could close at a different number, five or eight, for example. Closure comes about for other reasons. First, there is an introductory verse that indicates the “beginning” (*berešit*) of the action (Gen 1:1), and there are verses at the end containing words that indicate conclusion: “to complete” (*k.l.h*) and “to cease” (*š.b.t*) (Gen 2:1, 3). There is also a significant change in the nature of the activity after Day Six, indicating that the first type of activity, the creation of objects and beings in space, is over; Day Seven is about holiness in time. A separate summary in Gen 2:4a ends the story.³⁵ In addition, readers come to the text with the knowledge that there are seven days in a week.

B. H. Smith observed that formal types of repetition, which in Gen 1 include the counting of days and in poetry include rhyme, stress patterns, and syllable counts, are not sufficient conditions for closure.³⁶ They can structure a work, but on their own they do not bring it to closure. An analogy might be made with the sing-along song “Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall.” The stanzas repeat on and on: ninety-eight, ninety-seven, ninety-six, etc.³⁷ One soon recognizes the pattern of a countdown to zero.

³⁴ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 38–43.

³⁵ There is some question whether this verse is an original part of the P-source narrative; see Chapter 4, n. 15.

³⁶ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 48–49. Smith also discusses the specific use of a temporal sequence, such as the passage of time, as a structural principle. But, she points out, if the sequence is *only* temporal, the end-point will always be arbitrary. Therefore, time sequence must be looked at in conjunction with other approaches, as I have done in the discussion of Gen 1 (118).

³⁷ A simple melody accompanies these words in a countdown from ninety-nine to zero:

Ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall,
Ninety-nine bottles of beer,
If one of those bottles should happen to fall,

It is prior knowledge of this kind of counting that leads to closure or, if the repetitions are repetitious, a *desire* for closure.³⁸

3.5. *Closural Repetitions in End-Sections of the Genesis Narratives*

Of course, repetitions contribute more to closure than merely inducing the desire for it. They help bring about closure in various ways, as the following discussion of specific closural repetitions in the Genesis narratives demonstrates. It is also helpful to remember that in addition to the repetitions, there are other closural forms clustered in the end-sections.

3.5.1. *Closural Repetition and the New Equilibrium*

(a) *Thematic Repetition.* A three-time thematic repetition at the end of the Adam and Eve narrative reinforces the stability of the change in their lives. The change is final and irreversible. They are “banished” (*š.l.h* in *piel*) from the Garden of Eden, Adam is “driven out” (*g.r.š* in *piel*), and the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword will henceforth stand guard east of the Garden. Adam can never go back (Gen 3:23–24). This thematic repetition supports the finality and stability of the key transformation in the narrative. There is a new equilibrium in the world for man.³⁹

The permanence of the new equilibrium after the Flood in the J-source narrative is expressed first through prose (Gen 8:20–21) and a second time poetically (8:22). The very use of poetry by a writer/editor in a prose narrative can mark the end of a narrative, and this is demonstrated later in

Ninety-eight bottles of beer on the wall.
 Ninety-eight bottles of beer on the wall...
 Ninety-seven bottles of beer on the wall...

A more drinking-oriented version of this song has the verse:

Take one down,
 Pass it around,
 Ninety-eight bottles of beer on the wall.

³⁸ Repetition and the resulting *desire* for closure are discussed by B. H. Smith, in *Poetic Closure*, 42–43.

³⁹ The importance of “equilibrium” was discussed in Chapter 2. Tzvetan Todorov, in “Structural Analysis of Narrative,” 75, even described a (minimal) plot as “the shift from one equilibrium to another.” The narrative occurs in the period of imbalance. The plot can be defined by a series of causative steps in that period of imbalance, as outlined in the Kafalenos paradigm. A plot ends when a transformative action resolves the destabilized situation, and a new equilibrium is then established.

the chapter.⁴⁰ Here, the point is that the poetic repetition restates the transformation of the story and its new equilibrium. God will not again doom the earth. Although the poetic repetition is not thematically identical to the prose, its details particularized the new equilibrium for ancient readers.⁴¹ References in the poetry to planting and harvest would have been especially meaningful for the significant component of ancient Israelite society that was involved in agriculture. For all readers, it's satisfying to 'know' that God will not destroy this world again.

(b) *Key Word Repetition*. Alter describes the important role that key words play in establishing connections by linking actions, images, and ideas.⁴² Sometimes these key words are closural. This happens when they support the transformation in the story, even if only with nuanced changes that reflect the transformation and the new equilibrium.⁴³ When Abraham purchases a burial site for Sarah, two key words become closural: "to hear" (*š.m.ʿ*) and "to arise, stand, get up" (*q.w.m*) (Gen 23). Changes in these key words reflect what has occurred in the narrative. In the story, as Abraham negotiates with the people of the land to purchase a burial plot, the verb "to hear" is used five times; each time it essentially says "Hear!" or "Listen to me now!" This reflects the need of the participants to gain the attention of the other.⁴⁴ Then, in verse 16, Ephron the Hittite makes an offer of land and Abraham accepts it, bringing about the transition in the narrative. Now the verb "to hear" (*š.m.ʿ*) is used in the sense of acceptance, or "paying heed to," and it reflects the change in the relationship between Abraham and Ephron. The JPS translation emphasizes this aspect of the key word (23:16): "Abraham accepted (*wayyišmaʿ*) Ephron's terms. Abraham paid out to Ephron the money..."

⁴⁰ In Section 3.5.5, I investigate more fully the closural force that comes about when the writer introduces poetic tropes, that is, a changed meter and intense parallelism, at the end of a prose narrative.

⁴¹ The poetry extends the purview to agriculture and time. It does not include the prose statement that God will not bring destruction even if people behave badly.

⁴² Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 91–95.

⁴³ In Akkadian writing, Hurowitz, in "Alliterative Allusions," 83–86, shows that repeated words have different connotations in the two halves of protasis-apodosis sentences in "Advice for the Prince." Hurowitz does not examine the closural effect of this phenomenon but points out that the literary effect is that the punishment *sounds like* the crime described.

⁴⁴ "Hear" is used in the imperative and precativ in verses 6, 8, 11, 13, and 15. "To hear" is reinforced by its close proximity to the nouns "ear" (*ʾozen*) and "eye" (*ʾayin*); they support the verb's relationship to the senses.

In the same narrative, the verb “to arise” (*q.w.m*) also changes to reflect the new equilibrium. Before the transition, *q.w.m* is used to describe the actions of an individual who physically gets up or arises.⁴⁵ Once the burial site has been purchased, *q.w.m* refers existentially to the land. In two separate verses, *q.w.m* now expresses the conveyance of the land to Abraham: “The land passed (*wayyaqom*) . . . to Abraham.”⁴⁶

When Abraham first goes to Canaan in an earlier narrative, the key word “to go” (*h.l.k*) is a motif bound up with Abraham’s actions, and it too changes at the end to reflect the new equilibrium (Gen 12:1–9). In the first verse God tells Abraham, “Go forth” (*lekh lekha*) (12:1). The identical consonants of the verb form and the pronoun that follows it add emphasis to the importance of *h.l.k*.⁴⁷ Abraham does go forth. The narrator confirms it, and that is the transformative action: “Abraham went forth as the Lord had commanded him” (12:4a). When “to go” (*h.l.k*) is used following the transformation, it is an auxiliary verb with “to journey” (*n.s.‘*), and together the two words mean “to continue journeying” (12:9)⁴⁸ This reflects and supports the new equilibrium in this story; Abraham has become a resident alien of Canaan and will continue to journey in the land.

The modified use of “to go” (*h.l.k*) in Gen 12:1–9 also places a finalizing frame around the narrative. Whereas the first use of *h.l.k* is coupled with a word that repeated its consonants in the same order (*l.k* and *l.k*), at the end of the narrative *h.l.k* is coupled with a word that mirrors it, but in a different way. At the end *halokh*, (from *h.l.k*) is followed by *nasoa‘* (from *n.s.‘*). *Halokh* and *nasoa‘* share the same vowel pattern: short *a*, long *o*.⁴⁹ The linguistic repetitions of “to go” at beginning and end of the story frame it and support the thematic changes brought about by the transformation.

⁴⁵ Gen 23:3, 7.

⁴⁶ Gen 23:17, 20.

⁴⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar as Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kautzsch*, §119 *r*, *s*. Following the imperative form of “go,” the second word, *lekha*, לך, is the preposition ל that has the general understanding of *direction toward*, plus the pronoun ת, which agrees with the second masculine singular form of the verb (since the words are addressed to Abraham). It is “an apparently pleonastic *dativus ethicus*,” which, I suggest, can be understood as “You go, this is addressed to *you*.” The word “to go” (*h.l.k*) is also used in one instance in the narrative where it refers to Lot, who accompanies Abraham: “And Lot went with him” (12:4a).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, §113 *u*. The idea of long *continuance* is very frequently expressed by the verb “to go,” in the form of the infinitive absolute. When this form precedes a second infinitive absolute, as it does here with *n.s.‘*, the verb *h.l.k* functions as an adverb.

⁴⁹ *Halokh* and *nasoa‘* are both infinitive absolute forms.

3.5.2. *Integrity and Truthfulness*

(a) *Repeated Statement.* The childless Abraham and Sarah extend hospitality to three visitors; then one of them tells Abraham, “I will return to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!” in Gen 18:1–15, a narrative mentioned above. Sarah overhears and laughs at this assertion. The narrator explains that God knows she really means, “Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?” (18:13). Indeed the idea that ninety-year-old Sarah will have a child needs reinforcement. This is provided by God in a second statement of the impending birth (18:14):

Is anything too wondrous for the Lord? At the same season, I will return to you next year, and Sarah shall have a son.⁵⁰

God’s repetition of the promise is effective within the story, as well as on the plane of the discourse. Kawin’s point that repetitions have equal or greater force (compared with things that are repetitious) is clearly demonstrated here.⁵¹ On the story level, Sarah accepts the truthfulness of the statement once it is repeated by God. She not only accepts it, she even disclaims having laughed earlier, which had revealed her disbelief. Readers, too, experience the repetition as a validation that the promise will be fulfilled.

(b) *Repeated Action.* Repeated action can add to the integrity, or sense of truthfulness, of a first action. The altars that Abraham builds reinforce the image of Abraham’s loyalty to God (in Gen 12:1–9 mentioned above).⁵²

⁵⁰ The translation offered here is mine, not that of the JPS *Tanakh*. It reflects more closely the syntax of the Hebrew, which keeps together the words, “I will return to you next year.”

The Hebrew in each of the two presentations is almost the same. In the Hebrew, the key words in the message offer the proof, “I will return to you at this very season” (verses 10 and 14). In my translation below, italicized words indicate repetitions in the Hebrew.

(18:10) “*I will surely return to you at this very season* and, look, *a son shall Sarah your wife have.*”

(18:14) “*In due time I will return to you, at this very season, and Sarah shall have a son.*”

⁵¹ Kawin, *Telling It Again*, 4. This principle has been applied to biblical poetry by James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 13, 51, 60, 277. Kugel explains that for biblical poetry, the second stich (that is, the corresponding second half of the verse) works on the principle of intensification. If Kugel’s principle can be applied here, the narrative is effectively saying, “The angels say this will happen, and, what’s more, the Lord says so too.”

⁵² Abraham is the only patriarch who builds two altars in one narrative. Gen 12:8: “From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to the Lord *and invoked the Lord by name.*”

The reader is given minimal information, only that the altars were in two different places and that the second time Abraham initiated the interaction with God. Yet, the fact that the second incident is noted validates the first for the reader, who once more sees Abraham's commitment to God and his confidence in his relationship with him. The repeated action also helps validate God's choice of Abraham because he is devoted and obedient to him, a theme that is further developed in the *Akedah* (Gen 22).

The birth of a child is considered to be a gift or blessing from God in these stories, a counterpoint to the difficulty that Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel encounter when trying to have a child.⁵³ Double births at the ends of narratives intensify that point. A son is born to each of Lot's two daughters in the end-section of Gen 19:30–38, and twins are born to Tamar in Gen 38. In the latter story, Tamar was married in succession to two of Judah's sons, each of whom had died and left her still childless. When Judah persists in keeping his third son from marrying Tamar, although this was the custom, Tamar disguises herself as a harlot and tricks Judah into having sex with her; he doesn't know she is Tamar. Tamar gets pregnant. When Judah is told, he still does not realize his role in her pregnancy and accuses Tamar of harlotry (38:24). "Bring her out," said Judah, "and let her be burned." Then Judah learns the truth and he takes responsibility for *not* allowing her to have a child with his youngest son. Judah vindicates her behavior, at least relative to his own, saying, "She is more in the right than I" (*šadqah mimmeni*, 38:26). The birth of Perez and Zerah to Tamar in the end-section repeats the vindication, raises it to divine approval, and doubles it. God has given her twins. The repetition is conclusive both on the level of the characters in the story and on that of the reader who observes the action.

Repetitions abound in Gen 19:30–38, the tale of the birth of sons to the two daughters of Lot and their father.⁵⁴ In the narrative, two unnamed daughters of Lot are fearful that there are no other men left in the world for them "to consort with" after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot's older daughter, and then the younger, gets her father drunkenly

⁵³ The idea that the birth of a child is a gift from God can be seen in these examples: In Gen 25:21, "Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren and the Lord responded to his plea." In Gen 30:1–2, when Rachel had borne no children to Jacob although her sister Leah had, she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die." Jacob was incensed at Rachel, and said, "Can I take the place of God, who has denied you the fruit of the womb?"

⁵⁴ A "tale," Dan Ben-Amos explains in "Folklore in African Society," 166, is a form that "unsettles reality."

unaware, becomes impregnated by him, and gives birth to a boy. In the end-section, each of the sons is born and an etiology for each is noted by the narrator. He explains that the newborns are the progenitors of two peoples, the Moabites and the Ammonites (19:37, 38).

As structure, motif, keyword, theme, and etiology repeat in the story, one thinks of the comments of Smith and Kawin, that repetition works as it does in advertising and propaganda whether or not what is being repeated is accurate.⁵⁵ It simply “makes [something] intense and solid through persistence.”⁵⁶ Yet in this tale the repetitions do provide a satisfying aesthetic. At the end the repeated etiologies connect to readers and flatter them with the assumption that the Moabites and Ammonites referred to would be known to them.⁵⁷ The etiologies may not, in fact, authenticate the truthfulness of the story, but they help make the story itself memorable.

3.5.3. *Stopping the Forward Momentum of a Narrative by ‘Heaping Up’*

Repetitions in the telling of the narrative, that is, on the discourse level, can help bring a narrative to a close. It was noted earlier that repetitions at the ends of vernacular narratives “suspend the actions.”⁵⁸ This can be seen at the end of some of the Genesis narratives when the writer “heaps up” information, repeating one of its elements.

Three references to one place, Beersheba, cumulatively help bring the narrative of the treaty between Abraham and the Philistine King Abimelekh to a close. The arrival of Abimelekh and his chief of troops to Abraham is the destabilizing action in the story (Gen 21:22–34).⁵⁹ In the end-section, they swear an oath and the visitors depart. Abraham is then able to remain where he has been, presumably undisturbed by Abimelekh’s men in the future; the new equilibrium is established. In that

⁵⁵ Kawin, *Telling It Again*, 35; B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 156.

⁵⁶ Kawin, *Telling It Again*, 49.

⁵⁷ I discuss etiologies more fully in Chapter 5.

⁵⁸ Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, 379.

⁵⁹ This understanding of the structure of Gen 21:22–34 is supported by Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, 160. There are other ways the structure and history of the text have been understood. Paul Kalluveettil, in *Declaration and Covenant: A Comprehensive Review of Covenant Formulae from the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East*, proposes that Gen 21:22–34 is a composite text that includes a political treaty (E-source) and a sales contract for a well (J-source). The paradigm below is based on looking at the whole narrative as E and indicates that whatever its earlier source history, this narrative has one prime and one subordinate destabilizing factor, and they are resolved in the treaty process.

end-section, the place-name Beersheba is mentioned three times in succession. First an etiology of Beersheba is given (21:31). Then Beersheba is named as the place where Abraham and Abimelekh and Phicol made a covenant (21:32). Finally, Beersheba is noted as the place in which Abraham resides and remains for a long time (21:33). The action of the story has been totally halted by these statements.

Whereas Gen 21 repeats one place-name three times, in the J-source covenant between God and Abraham, a tenfold repetition of gentile names brings the narrative to a stop (Gen 15:1–21).⁶⁰ In the story, God

The Kafalenos Paradigm for Gen 21:22–34, Treaty between Abraham and Abimelekh

Function, main narrative	Additional instability factor	Function	Steps in plot of the narrative
EQ		<i>Equilibrium</i>	Abraham is living in Beersheba
A		<i>Destabilizing event, or reevaluation that reveals instability</i>	Visit of Abimelekh and Phicol causes issues to be raised: they want to make a treaty, 22–23.
C		<i>Decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A</i>	Abraham agrees to a treaty, 24.
	a	<i>Reevaluation reveals instability</i>	Abraham raises issue of problem with well, 25.
	C	<i>C-actant decides to alleviate a</i>	Abraham criticizes Abimelekh about what his servants had done, 25.
	D	<i>C-actant is tested</i>	Abimelekh tells Abraham he didn't know, 26.
H		<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A</i>	Abraham takes sheep and oxen and gives them to Abimelekh, and the two of them make a pact, 27.
	E	<i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Abraham brings seven ewes, 28–29.
	H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate</i>	Abimelekh's acceptance of the ewes is proof that Abraham dug the wells, 30.
I	I	<i>Success or not</i>	Success. They swear an oath at Beersheba, and Abimelekh and Phicol depart, 31–32.
EQ		<i>New equilibrium</i>	Abraham resided there, 34.

⁶⁰ The list of ten names of peoples at the end of Gen 15 is unique as a unit in Genesis. Nahum Sarna, *JPS Tanakh: Genesis*, 117–118 and 359, n. 23, explains that this is the most extensive of the seventeen similar lists among the historical books; other lists include seven groups, or six, or five; one has three. In addition, four of the groups mentioned, the

comes to Abraham and makes a promise to him that he will have descendants who will inherit the land. A ceremony marks the completion of their interaction: “a smoking oven and a flaming torch passed between those pieces [of sacrificial animals].” At that point, the narrator explains that God has made a covenant with Abraham; the land with its present inhabitants will in the future be given to Abraham’s descendants. The inhabitants are named: the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites (15:21). There appears to be no particular sequence to the names listed, nor are the peoples differentiated from one another. They are not identified by where they are located, by their relative size or power, or by their relationship with each other or with the patriarchs.⁶¹ The cumulative effect of the ten names cuts off any further forward movement in the story.

3.5.4. *Revealing the Author’s Didactic Interests*

The end of a narrative (or speech) has long been understood as the place in which the writer or speaker can impart ideas that remain with the audience after the end of the work. A writer may repeat or distill earlier points made as he exhibits his “inherent interest,” as Kavin termed it.⁶² Aristotle spoke of the need for public speakers to repeat earlier statements they deemed most important at the end of a speech.⁶³ For the modern novel, Marianna Torgovnick states that “the ending is the single place where an author most pressingly desires to make his points.”⁶⁴ Readers of biblical narrative may recognize this strategy and expect that a didactic restate-ment or clarification signals the end of a story.

The Adam and Eve story instructs the reader that disobeying God brings about punishment for the serpent (he will have no legs *and* will be hated

Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, and Rephaim, do not appear in any other list; the Hivites, featured in other lists, are not included here.

⁶¹ This type-repetition is analogous to iterative actions, like Abraham’s “journeying” in the land (Gen 12:9), in which repeated actions are not differentiated and they are not given in any particular sequence; see Section 3.3.2.

⁶² Kavin, *Telling It Again*, 4–5.

⁶³ Aristotle, as was noted earlier in this chapter, in *The Art of Rhetoric*, 261, 1419b, explained that when giving a speech, the speaker should repeat the points made earlier to be clearly understood.

⁶⁴ Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, 19. Torgovnick discusses “self-aware authors” who have mastered their ideas and know what they want to say by way of closure, then do it, 18.

by mankind) and for the woman (she bear the pain of childbirth *and* that punishment is compounded by her own sexual urges); men will have lives of toil, and lives for all will end in dust (Gen 14–19). The end-section of the narrative between God and Abraham that explains the covenant of circumcision demonstrates to readers that Abraham himself enacted the commandment of circumcision as soon as God told him to do so (Gen 17). The narrator explains that Abraham circumcised himself, his son, and those in his household, including slaves after God completed his directions to him. As Abraham fulfills this commandment, the narrator repeats the names and designations of those who are circumcised.

The repetitions at the end of the narrative in which Abraham purchases a burial site make it clear that the writer wanted to assert absolutely that Abraham owned the land in which his wife would be buried, and also that the transaction was absolutely legal (Gen 23). The importance of this is first indicated when he asks the local people to *sell* him land for a burial site and he refuses to accept land that would not be his own (23:4, 8). The bulk of the narrative relates how he goes about purchasing land from the Hittites, who own it (23:3–16). The last verses reassure readers that Abraham's ownership of land in Canaan is legal and that the new equilibrium is stable and absolutely final (23:17–20). In verse 17, the land is precisely identified as that which Ephron the Hittite had owned; its location and topography are stated. In verse 18, the witnesses to the transaction are identified twice—once as the Hittites and a second time as all those who come in at the gate of the city. In verse 19, Abraham takes physical possession of the land by burying Sarah. The field, with its cave, is identified, this time more extensively (it is in Hebron, in the land of Canaan). In verse 20, the legality of the “transference” (*q.w.m*) of the land from the Hittites to Abraham is mentioned again, and the phrase “burial site” (*’aḥuzzat-qeber*) is repeated from verse 4. The writer is taking no chances. The deed is valid; the burial site belongs to Abraham (and his heirs).⁶⁵

The importance of endogamous marriage, as opposed to marriage outside the extended family, is asserted in various ways in the narrative that precedes Jacob's departure for the east (Gen 27:46–28:9). This didactic lesson is the point of the epilogue to the story as well. The narrative opens with a destabilizing statement as Rebekah, mother of Esau and Jacob, says

⁶⁵ Nahum Sarna, in *JPS Genesis*, 160, suggests that the land transfer is “absolute and incontestable” and confers upon Abraham “the power to dispose of the property by testament or will” because it was sold on the basis that it would be a burial site and that is how it is used, as described in 23:19.

to her husband, Isaac, "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women [who are local and whom her son Esau has married]. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these . . . what good will life be to me?" (27:46). Isaac sends for Jacob, blesses him, and instructs him not to take a wife from among the Canaanites but to leave for the east, to Paddan-aram, where Laban, Rebekah's brother, lives with his household, and get a wife from there. Jacob leaves for the east, providing the key transformation in the narrative. The last four verses are an epilogue, which repeats the author's didactic intentions (Gen 28:6–9).

The narrator then tells the reader that Esau had observed his father's actions and words when he blessed Jacob and charged him not to take a Canaanite wife because Canaanite women displeased him (Gen 28:6–8). So, Esau went to his father's brother, Ishmael, and took a wife from that branch of the family in addition to the wives he already had. This final act in the narrative shows that even the un-blessed son of Isaac appreciated the importance of endogamous marriage. The didactic point of this story, first stated by Rebekah, is incorporated into Isaac's words to Jacob and then is repeated a third time in the end-section epilogue.

3.5.5. *Aesthetic Repetitions, Including Poetry, and Readers' Enjoyment*

Repetitions can be artful. When poetic elements are introduced into a prose narrative, it momentarily demands readers' attention: Why the change in style? Is the prose narrative over? The surprise and aesthetics of the new style, the logic of the poetic verses themselves, and the intensification of a prior prose statement all help bring a narrative to a satisfactory close. Examples in the end-sections of the creation of woman narrative (Gen 2:23, embedded in the Adam and Eve story), in the J-source Flood narrative (Gen 8:22), in the P-source Flood narrative (Gen 9:4–5, 6), and in the story of Noah after the Flood (Gen 9:25–27) demonstrate the closural force of a poetic ending in a prose narrative.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ In *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative*, 3, Steven Weitzman explains that "poetry . . . conveys what the medium of prose cannot communicate by itself," but warns against projecting contemporary understanding of prose and poetry onto a culture that may have had a different conception of these literary modes. His own study demonstrates how the re-contextualization of biblical songs was part of an Israelite tradition.

The poetic verse in the creation of woman narrative occurs after the transition; God has created the woman and brought her to the man, Adam (Gen 2:23).⁶⁷ Adam exclaims:

This one (*zo't*) at last
Is bone (*'ešem*) of my bones (*'ešmai*)
And flesh (*basar*) of my flesh (*bisari*).
This one (*zo't*) shall be called Woman (*'iššah*)
For from man (*'iš*) was taken this one (*zo't*).⁶⁸

The rhythm and repetitions form a pleasing and conclusive structure. The verse is filled with poetic repetitions and parallels of morphological, syntactical, lexical, semantic, and phonological forms.⁶⁹ For example, two word-pairs repeat twice: “bone”/“flesh” and “man”/“woman.” The second and third stich both repeat one of the word-pairs (“bone” or “flesh”), inflected for the first-person pronoun, that is, “my bone” and “my flesh.” The Hebrew for “this one” (*zo't*) frames the whole and points demonstratively as the “Woman” is given a name.

The chain of reasoning in the last stich, “For from man she was taken” is a device that is closural in poetry. B. H. Smith has shown that logic at the end of a poem can provide closure.⁷⁰ Here the logic draws from folk etymology that uses the sound similarities between the Hebrew words for “man” and “woman” (although they have different roots). The rationale in the verse responds to a perceived need to satisfy readers who would want to know why the new creature was given this name.

The poetic final verse at the end of the J-source Flood story is also a stylistic change from the prose narrative. The verse repeats the theme of the prose ending—that God will not again destroy the earth (Gen 8:22):

⁶⁷ The final verse, Gen 2:24, is a proverb or saying, a form that is closural in a number of narratives; see Chapter 5.

⁶⁸ A stich is a portion of a verse or line. The final stich of this verse is translated here to better reflect the word order of the Hebrew; it is my own translation, not that of JPS.

⁶⁹ Adele Berlin classifies these types of parallels in *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*. The parallel repetitions are grammatical and morphological, *me'ašmi/mivsari*; grammatical and syntactical, *'ešem me'ašmi/ basar mivsari*; lexical (word-pairs), *'ešem/ basar; 'iš/ 'iššah*; semantic (A, what's more B), bone, flesh; and phonological, the rhythm provided by the three- time repetition of *zo't*, including the first and last spoken words.

⁷⁰ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 131–133, notes that in some poetry, a chain of reasoning or a type of logical sequence can give closural force, as, for example, in Andrew Marvell's “To His Coy Mistress,” where, she explains, “the three divisions of the poem correspond exactly to the major and minor premises and conclusion of a formal syllogism.”

So long as the earth endures,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Summer and winter,
Day and night
 Shall not cease.

Word-pairs with contrasting meanings—seedtime/harvest, cold/heat, summer/winter, day/night—affirm the completeness and permanence of the new equilibrium.

The long end-section of the P-source Flood narrative is topically divided into two sub-sections, and here I focus on the poetic elements of the first sub-section, which explains a new rule for mankind: animals may be eaten but animal blood, and all blood, is special and forbidden (9:1–7).⁷¹

(4) But (*'akh*), flesh with its lifeblood (*nefeš*, *dam*) still in it
 You shall not eat.

(5) And just so (*'akh*), your lifeblood (*dam*, *nefeš*) I will requite (*d.r.š*),
 From (*miyyad*) every beast I will requite it (*d.r.š*),
 And from (*miyyad*) humankind (*ha'adam*),
 From (*miyyad*) every man's brother,
 I will requite (*d.r.š*) human life (*nefeš ha'adam*).⁷²

(6) Whoever sheds (*š.p.h*) the blood (*dam*) of man (*ha'adam*),
 By man (*be'adam*) shall his blood (*dam*) be shed (*š.p.h*).
 For in His image did God make man (*ha'adam*).

These densely poetic verses are structured by key words and chiasm (9:4–6).⁷³ The Hebrew word *'akh* is the first word in verses 4 and 5 and provides a structure for them. Altogether, five key words are repeated in the verses: “but,” “lifeblood,” “to requite,” “from,” “man.” *Miyyad*, literally “from the hand of,” repeats in the second half of verse 5 and emphasizes that this instruction applies to man and beast. In verse 6, the words of the first stich, “whoever sheds the blood of man,” are repeated in the second stich in inverted chiastic order, that is, A-B-C repeats as C¹-B¹-A¹: A = “to shed” (*š.p.h*); B = “blood” (*dam*); C = “the man” (*ha'adam*). The final repetition

⁷¹ The second sub-section of the end of the P-source Flood narrative presents the covenant between God and mankind with its sign, the rainbow, 9:8–17.

⁷² This translation is by Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, 50.

⁷³ A chiasm is “a formal pattern of any literary or theoretical unit that preserves symmetry while reversing the order of the terms to produce the sequence ABBA” (Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, 668).

of the C-word, “man,” ties it back to the double use of “man” (*ha’adam*) in verse 5 and aurally to the word for “blood” (*dam*) used throughout.

The closural chain of reasoning, noted in Gen 2:23 for the creation of woman, is evident here as well. The logical relationship between verses 4, 5, and 6 demonstrates coherence in the section. Verse 4 is the outright prohibition of eating the flesh of a living animal: “But flesh with its lifeblood still in it you shall not eat.” Verse 5 explains that the inference should be drawn that God will hold people and beasts responsible for taking this lifeblood. Verse 6 provides the rationale behind the prohibition.

Poetic elements complete the narrative of Noah’s activities after the flood (9:18–27). In the story Noah plants a vineyard; he drinks, becomes drunk, and uncovers himself in his tent. His son Ham sees him uncovered, and that is the destabilizing action that propels the narrative. Stability is re-established when his sons Shem and Japheth avert their eyes and cover him. Noah wakes, curses Ham (actually he curses Ham’s son Canaan) and blesses sons Shem and Japhet (9:25–27). Noah speaks:

- He said,
 A “Cursed be Canaan;
 The lowest of slaves (*‘ebed ‘abadim*)⁷⁴
 Shall he be to his brothers.”
 And he said,
 B “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem;
 A¹ Let Canaan be a slave (*‘ebed*) to them.
 C May God enlarge (*y.p.t*) Japheth (*y.p.t*),
 And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
 A² And let Canaan be a slave (*‘ebed*) to them.”

“To curse” and “to bless,” a contrasting word-pair, provide structure for the verses. The cursing of Canaan as a slave to his brothers begins, centers, and ends the verses. The third repetition of this concept, A², precisely repeats A¹ and provides an emphatic end to the verses. Linguistically, these key words repeat: “curse,” “Canaan,” “slave (or slave of slaves),” and “Shem.” In addition, two forms of the same root letters (*y.p.t*) are an entertaining pun at the beginning of the last verse: “May God enlarge (*y.p.t*) Japheth (*y.p.t*)” (9:27).

These examples of poetry, with their surprise introduction of stylistic change, their aesthetically pleasing repetitions, and their internal logic, bring pleasure and a sense of the coherence of the unit as a narrative ends.

⁷⁴ *‘ebed ‘abadim* is literally “slave of slaves.”

The enjoyment is coupled with other closural factors: the resolution of the destabilizing action and reinforcement of the new equilibrium. These poetic devices make it easier to accept when a good story is ending.

3.6. *Conclusion*

When an artist repeats something, is it a sign of maturity, of assurance, and of strength in his vision, or is it a dearth of new ideas?⁷⁵ Kawin asked this question when he contrasted “repetition” with “repetitious.” The examples demonstrate that actions, ideas, motifs, and key words that repeat at the end often have a constructive role in bringing narratives to a satisfactory conclusion. They are aesthetically pleasing, they emphasize important points that the authors wished to leave with the reader, they add finality and stability to their narratives, they help the narrative come to a halt, and they create a sense of integrity and honesty in their narratives. The artistic process of repetition engages the reader, who is involved in the “developing present” of the evolving story.⁷⁶ The repetitions bring information from earlier in the narrative into the present time and to the readers, preparing them for the future, which in this case is the cessation of a narrative.

In the next chapter, I explore other linguistic elements that serve as markers for the end of a biblical narrative.

⁷⁵ Kawin, *Telling It Again*, 181–82.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

CHAPTER FOUR

LINGUISTIC DEVICES

4.1. Introduction

When the narrator tells the reader at the end of Gen 25, “Thus did Esau spurn the birthright” (25:34b), he summarizes a colorful narrative in four words (in the Hebrew).¹ He also adds his own spin to the story. The device of a summary at the end is common in the Genesis stories. Other common linguistic devices in end-sections are single words that capture the

¹ The Hebrew words are *עָשָׂה אֶת-הַבְּכֹרָה וַיָּבוּ*, Gen 25:34b.

Kafalenos' Paradigm for Gen 25:19–34, Birth and Birthright of Esau and Jacob

	Function	Causal steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Rebekah is pregnant, 21.
A (or a)	<i>Destabilizing event (or reevaluation that reveals instability)</i>	The twins struggle in her womb, 22.
B	<i>Request that someone alleviate A or a</i>	Rebekah appeals to God, but he explains that the expected rules of primogeniture will not hold, 22–23.
C	<i>Decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A or a. The C-actant is the character who performs function C</i>	Jacob, the younger, has tasty stew available when his brother Esau arrives famished. In return for the food Jacob demands the birthright from his brother, 31.
D	<i>C-actant is tested</i>	Esau suggests that it is unnecessary to request it because he would die from starvation anyway, 32
E	<i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Jacob insists that Esau swear, 33.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a</i>	Esau swears to him and sells the birthright, 33.
I, or I (neg)	<i>Success (or failure) of H</i>	Jacob will henceforth be considered the older son of his father Isaac, 33.
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	Jacob will henceforth be considered the older son of his father Isaac.

essence of a story, absolute words, hyperbole, and language relating to natural ending points (like death, for example); in addition, frames often include linguistic elements that are closural.² Some linguistic devices are not inherently closural, yet in context they contribute to closure. For example, the name “Nod” in the Cain and Abel story, a pun on the verb “to wander” (*n.w.d.*), supports the transformation and adds an entertaining element as the story ends.

4.2. *Summaries: Recapitulation and Didactics*

Summaries are closural. They recapitulate what has occurred and as they do this they stop the forward movement of the story’s action. In these narratives they generally summarize not the whole story but elements of the key transforming event. A summary may do this by repeating key words of the transformation, such as the modified repetitions noted in Chapter 3, or the summary may express the key idea using different words. The effect of the recapitulation aspect of a summary is similar to that brought about by a linguistic frame—it is a signal to the reader that the preceding events are a unit and that the unit has been completed.

When a writer chooses to make specific points in the summary he often reveals a didactic purpose, an effect first noted by Aristotle and observed by others. Aristotle explained that summaries give a speaker the opportunity to make the points he feels are most important.³ For Latin poetry Don Fowler shows that at the end of their poems, poets would look back over the whole work.⁴ In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth shows how summaries generalize the significance of the whole work.⁵

² In Chapter 3, frames were examined primarily for their structural contributions to closure.

³ In Chapter 3, I noted that Aristotle, in *The Art of Rhetoric*, 260 (1419b), found that a summary was an effective close for speeches because the speaker would recapitulate, that is, review the points he felt were important and that he wanted the listener to remember.

⁴ Don Fowler, “First Thoughts on Closure: Problems and Prospects.” In *Roman Constructions: Readings in Postmodern Latin*, 265–266 and n. 102.

⁵ Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 197. Booth contrasts the didactic summary with other types of summaries (169–209). For example, an author can choose to allocate a summary to a narrator if the reader cannot know something otherwise. Or, the writer might not feel it important to recount an event in depth; and, for literary purposes, a writer can use a summary to heighten the intensity of a particular moment. Booth does not focus on the end of a work.

Some of the Genesis summaries appear didactic; the Esau-Jacob birth-right summary only describes Esau's role, yet one could also say that the summary could include Jacob's outsized demand from his brother as well. The story itself begins with the destabilizing knowledge that God imparts to the pregnant Rebekah: her older twin, Esau, would serve the younger twin, Jacob, upsetting the conventions of primogeniture. In the transformative scene that the narrator summarizes, Esau is coming in from the fields and is famished. He asks Jacob for some of the stew he is cooking (25:29–30). Jacob replies, "First sell me your birthright." Esau agrees, explaining, "I am at the point of death, so of what use is my birthright to me?" Jacob demands that Esau swear that he will give up the birthright. Esau swears to it (25:31–33). With the final words of the narrative, the narrator summarizes the key transformative event: "Thus did Esau spurn the birthright." The narrator makes no comment about Jacob's lack of brotherly concern or his cunning, nor does he comment that this outcome was presaged before their birth. I mention this not to argue the merits of the actions of either of the brothers, but to note that the author completes his narrative by having the narrator denigrate Esau. This summary both recapitulates and makes its didactic point.

Other summaries are not didactic. In Gen 15, the word of God comes to Abraham in a vision. God promises that Abraham's "own issue" will be his heirs; they will be very numerous and the land will become his as a possession (15:4–5, 8). In the mysterious ritual that follows, Abraham cuts up animals and a flaming torch passes between the pieces (15:10–17). Then, in a summary the narrator repeats the terms of God's commitment—the promises of the offspring and the land (15:18–21):

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "to your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, the Kenizzites . . . and the Jebusites."

The word "covenant" (*brit*) in the summary is an example of another closural device, that of a single-word figurative summary and that is discussed in Section 4.2.3.

The summary at the end of the Tower of Babel narrative (Gen 11:1–9, J-source) recapitulates the outcome of that story. In the narrative, God perceives a situation on earth with which he is unhappy. He decides to take action by "confounding [the] speech" of the people who are building the tower (11:5–7). The end-section begins when God confounds their speech. They stop building their city and tower and scatter over the face of the earth (11:8). The last verse summarizes that "there the Lord confounded

the speech of the whole earth; and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth" (11:9).⁶

4.2.1. *Summaries in Epilogues*

The summaries noted above (Gen 11, 15, and 25) occur immediately after the conclusion of the plot. Sometimes the end-section of a narrative is more complex, and the summary is in an epilogue, as in the Gen 6–9 Flood story, in the Gen 17 covenant with Abraham, and in Abraham's purchase of a burial site in Gen 23, which are all P-source narratives.⁷ Epilogues are part of the end-sections of their narratives, and they do not change the new equilibrium that has been established. However, in the epilogue, the narrator often adds important information related to the actions of the narrative, and this "helps to realize fully the design of the work."⁸ The information in the end-summary may come from the whole narrative or just from the epilogue.

The end-section of the P-source Flood story begins as God tells Noah, together with his family and all living things, to leave the ark so that they can repopulate the world (8:15–19). Then God blesses Noah and his sons and establishes a new set of rules: henceforth, man will be allowed to eat animal flesh as long as he does not eat its blood, and murders must be requited by mankind (9:1–7).⁹ In the epilogue, 9:8–18,¹⁰ God establishes a covenant between himself and mankind: the earth will never again be destroyed by flood. God gives the rainbow as the sign of this covenant (9:8–17). The last verse (9:17), summarizes only the epilogue:¹¹

⁶ The last verse is also part of an etiology that explains the meaning of Babel; the role of etiologies is discussed in Chapter 5.

⁷ The epilogues of Gen 9 and 17 are structured as chiasms, that is, as "a formal pattern of any literary or theoretical unit that preserves symmetry while reversing the order of the terms, to produce the sequence ABBA." Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds., *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, 668. See also Chapter 3, n. 73.

⁸ Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, 27. See also in Chapter 3, n. 73.

⁹ The initial "reevaluation that reveals instability" (causal action A in the Kafalenos paradigm) occurs in Gen 6:11–13; God sees the corruption of mankind on the earth and decides to destroy it. God's "primary action to alleviate A" occurs when he allows Noah to leave the ark and repopulate the world, Gen 8:15–19.

¹⁰ It is also possible to consider Gen 9:1–7 as a *first* epilogue and Gen 9:8–17 as a *second* epilogue.

¹¹ Verse 17 forms a frame with verse 12, where the rainbow motif was introduced: "God further said, 'This is the sign that I set for the covenant between Me and you, and every living creature with you, for all ages to come.'"

"That [the rainbow]," God said to Noah, "shall be the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on earth."

The summary in the covenant of circumcision narrative (Gen 17) also recapitulates what has occurred in the epilogue.¹² In the story, God bestows the covenant personally on Abraham and on his descendants through Isaac, who will be born to Sarah. The sign of this covenant, circumcision, is explained. In the epilogue (Gen 17:23–27), Abraham circumcises himself, his son Ishmael, and all the male members of his household. The final two verses (26–27) summarize the events of the epilogue:¹³

Thus Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on that very day; and all his household, his homeborn slaves and those that had been bought from outsiders, were circumcised with him.

When Abraham purchases land in Canaan as a burial site for Sarah who has died, Gen 23, the summary recapitulates the transformation, which is the point of the entire story. The end-section begins at the moment of the transfer of the property from Ephron to Abraham (Gen 23:16). The verses that follow are an epilogue that adds information about the legality of the land transfer (Gen 23:17–20). The final verse succinctly distills the narrative's transformation: "Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site" (v. 20).

4.2.2. *Summaries from Different Documentary Sources*

In all the previous examples, the narrative and its closural summary are the work of the same author. When the bulk of the narrative comes from one source and a summary is from a different source, the added summary may provide a different view of the events or may be moderated by its context. Sometimes the added summary supplements an existing one. In the Sodom and Gomorrah story, which is primarily from the J-source, and in the P-source creation story the redactor demonstrates his didactic role by adding summaries that change the final impact or emphasis of the stories.

¹² The Kafalenos paradigm for Gen 17 is in Chapter 3, n. 35. This narrative, as discussed in the same note, can alternatively be understood as a 'minimal story' that is comprised of three related events and little action.

¹³ The final verse (Gen 17:27) also forms a frame with the first part of the epilogue (17:23). In addition, the verses between the two frame sections (17:24–25) state in parallel verses the ages of Abraham and Ishmael.

Before the actual destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1–29), Lot's actions are virtuous. In fact, the J-source may consider Lot one of the "righteous ones/innocent ones" (*s.d.q.*), as described by Abraham in the prior J-source story, where Abraham negotiates with God to save the city if a sufficient number of innocent inhabitants can be found (18:23–33). Here Lot is the character who protects the angels who were staying with him in Sodom from the angry townspeople (19:4–11); he acknowledges God's (or the angel's) graciousness to him in saving his life during the destruction as he and the angel flee, (19:19–21); he asks, and the angel allows him, to rest in the town of Zo'ar, which is saved from the destruction that rains down on Sodom and Gomorrah. A descriptive summary from the J-source seems to bring the narrative to an end: on the day after the destruction, Abraham looks down over the transformed landscape (19:27–28):

Next morning, Abraham hurried to the place where he had stood before the Lord, and, looking down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and all the land of the Plain, he saw the smoke of the land rising like the smoke of a kiln.

To this ending, the narrator adds a summary from the P-source (Gen 19:29):

Thus it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the Plain and annihilated the cities where Lot dwelt, God was "mindful" (*z.k.r.*) of Abraham and removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval.

This final summary, the P-source addition, emphasizes God's relationship with Abraham. It does not note the J-source evidence of Lot's righteous behavior. In the P summary, God "remembers/is mindful" (*z.k.r.*) of *Abraham*, and that is why he "removed Lot from the midst of the upheaval."

The effect of the editor's conflation of these verses is somewhat unsettling at the end. To the assumption that God saved Lot because of Lot's righteous behavior with his visitors, one now looks to his uncle Abraham, of whom God was mindful or remembers. Perhaps God saves Lot because he remembers Abraham's argument on behalf of the righteous of Sodom, or perhaps God's relationship with Abraham extends to mindfulness of Abraham's nephew.

The P-source creation story (Gen 1:1–2:4a) also has two summaries. They do not contradict each other, but each focuses on different aspects of the narrative. In context, the two summaries are, first, a relatively detailed summary statement that is theological in nature and, second, a more generalized summary that examines the preceding events as historical narrative. Each on its own forms a frame with the first verse of the narrative, "When God began to create heaven and earth." The first summary is part of the original P-source (2:3): And God blessed the seventh day and

declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that he had done.

The second summary, which immediately follows the first, uses formulaic language (“such is the story,” [*’elle toledot*]), a form that is a characteristic organizer of the narrative in P and occurs ten additional times in Genesis.¹⁴ However, this is the only instance in which it summarizes rather than introduces a narrative or genealogy (2:4a)¹⁵:

Such is the story (*’elle toledot*) of heaven and earth when they were created.

The first summary sums up God’s action of the first six days with the phrase “all his work.” Linguistically, it repeats the verb “to create” in the same form as in Gen 1:1, *bara’*. For this summary, the theological relationship between God’s cessation of action after Day Six and the related holiness of the seventh day is most important.

The second summary is abstract, as is the nature of the *’elle toledot* formulas. No concrete details are given, nor is God even mentioned. It repeats the words “heaven and earth” from 1:1, and the verb “to create” is repeated as well, although in a different form (*niphal* infinitive).¹⁶ But, God’s role in the process of creation is not stated, nor is his name mentioned.

4.2.3. *Single-Word Summaries*

Sometimes a single word in the end-section is closural because it sums up a key idea of the narrative, and this can be observed in some of the

¹⁴ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis with an Introduction and Notes*, ii.

¹⁵ There is disagreement among scholars regarding verse 2:4a and its relationship to the first and second creation stories. In all other instances where it occurs in Genesis, the *’elle toledot* formula *precedes* the material to which it is related. This would suggest that it is part of the Adam and Eve narrative that follows. Its possible role as an introduction to the second creation story seems to be supported by the Masoretic text, which includes the letter *peh* after verse 2:3, indicating a space marker before the beginning of another section. In Richard Elliott Friedman’s *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, 35, this verse is printed as a separate one-verse paragraph followed by a colon; thus, it appears to introduce the second creation story (Gen 2:4b–3:24). Yet, the verse does summarize the preceding narrative, and Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 15, includes it as the concluding part of the first creation story, as do J. Estlin Carpenter, *The Composition of the Hexateuch*, 509, and Driver, *Genesis*, viii. The origin of the formula is another issue. Otto Eissfeldt, in *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 205, states that this formula is the work of P, who used it to create a “continuous chronology.” Friedman, *Bible*, 15, attributes this formula to a redactor who “edited source texts into a continuous story,” and the formula itself was derived from “a text that was originally an independent work, The Book of Records (*toledot*) which begins at Gen 5:1.” See also the discussion in Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis*, pp. 13–15.

¹⁶ In verse 1:1, the verb “to create” is in the *qal* perfect.

narratives discussed previously. The word “covenant” (*brit*) appears only once in Gen 15, in the end-section, and there it crystallizes the relationship that God has established with Abraham in the narrative (Gen 15:20). In the Jacob and Esau story in which Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a swallow of stew (Gen 25:19–34), the key word “birthright” (*bekorah*) is used four times in the last five verses and is the final word as well. In the narrative about Dinah, who was seized by Shechem, the son of a local chieftain, the word “whore” (*zonah*) in the last verse figuratively summarizes the brothers’ concern for how outsiders have treated their sister; the word “whore” provides a reason for their overzealous behavior (Gen 34).¹⁷ *Zonah* can even be considered a hyperbole in that story (hyperbole is another of the devices discussed below) because there is no indication in the narrative that Shechem thought Dinah was offering herself for hire.¹⁸

In the E-source story of Hagar and her son Ishmael (Gen 21), a single word metaphorically summarizes God’s promise to Abraham.¹⁹ When Hagar gives water to Ishmael it indicates that he will live and, as promised, become a great nation). Early in the story, as Isaac has begun to grow, Sarah urges Abraham to cast out Ishmael, Hagar’s son with Abraham, from their household. God approves of this action, promising that he will take care of Ishmael (21:13). Abraham sends them away, performing the destabilizing action in the narrative (21:14). In the wilderness, Ishmael is about to die, but God hears the child crying. This begins the end-section (21:17–21). An angel opens Hagar’s eyes to the presence of a

¹⁷ The brothers’ use of the word “whore” (*zonah*) is echoed in a later narrative (Num 25:1–9) in which the people of Israel “profaned themselves by ‘whoring’ (*liznot*, root *z.n.h.*) with the Moabite women who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god” (25:1–2).

¹⁸ Compare the descriptions of Tamar’s action in Gen 38:14–18 and its description in 38:24.

¹⁹ The use of the term “metaphor” here is to emphasize the ability of a figurative word to connect past and future events (similar to how Kavin, *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film*, 5–6, explained the ability of repetitions to emphasize and interweave events). The idea that the word “she gave [him] drink” is figurative or metaphoric suggests that the notion of the word suggests additional layers of meaning, that her act both revives him and provides the sustenance he needs to grow and prosper in the future. Elizabeth J. MacArthur, *Extravagant Narrative: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form*, 25, contrasts the term “metaphoric” for endings with “metonymic.” She explains that endings that are metaphoric indicate the writer’s decision to signal to readers that he has written the narrative with awareness of how it will conclude. She attributes her use of this term in this way to Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*. See also Walter B. Crouch, *Death and Closure in Biblical Narrative*, 30, n. 50–53, who uses the term in a similar manner. This is an expansive use of the term metaphor, according to Andrea L. Weiss, personal communication.

well with water that can save the child. The word that follows (it is one word in the Hebrew) establishes the new equilibrium that allows Ishmael to live: "She gave [him] drink" (*watašq*). The narrator then explains that Ishmael will indeed do well because God is with him, and that he lived in the wilderness (far from Abraham and Sarah).

The words noted above, "covenant," "birthright," "whore," and "give a drink [which revives]," are intrinsically connected with prior information in their texts and with aspects of the future. In a figurative (or "metaphoric") way, these words complete and enhance an understanding of what has occurred in their narratives and connect these stories to future events and narratives.

4.3. *Unqualified Assertions*

4.3.1. *Absolute Words*

Unqualified assertions suggest the ultimate nature of things. When they appear in the end-sections, they contribute to a sense of finality. Barbara Herrnstein Smith noted this phenomenon in poetry, explaining that absolute words and hyperbole create a sense that nothing further need or could be said on a topic.²⁰ These devices are not always closural, but they *are* closural when they support the transformative change in the narrative and the new equilibrium.

Statements that assert "all" or "never again" fit into this category. In the Tower of Babel story (Gen 11:1–9), unqualified assertion marks both the beginning and the end; it forms a frame that affirms the finality of the concluding event. In verse 1, the expression "all the earth" (*kol-ha'areš*) is introduced; at the end it is repeated three times, in verses 8 and 9. The idea that "all" people who now speak so many different languages, all of us, are descended from that initial group of travelers who spoke one language, lived for a short time in Shinar, and tried to build a tower there is a powerful assertion. The framing and repetitions work together to boldly assert this argument.

The pronouncement of Abimelekh, King of Gerar, at the end of the Isaac wife-sister narrative is absolute and unqualified (Gen 26:11). When Abimelekh learns that Rebekah is Isaac's wife and not Isaac's sister, he first speaks of the potential guilt he and his people face. Then the king charges

²⁰ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, 183–187.

"all the people" (*kol ha'am*), saying, "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death (*mot yumat*)."²¹ This final declaration is also more authoritative than his earlier statement; a change to an authoritative tone at the end, another closural device, is discussed in the next section.

Unqualified assertions are made by God to Abraham in the end-sections of Gen 15 and 18. In Gen 15, when God makes a covenant with Abraham and promises that his descendants will inherit the land, the list of names of peoples that concludes the narrative is unique in Genesis and is the most extensive list of names of peoples among the historical books.²¹ Ten different nations will be displaced by Abraham's descendants (Gen 15:20–21). In Gen 18, after the visitors/angels have promised that Sarah will have a child—which causes Sarah to laugh—God repeats the message. He asserts, "Is *anything* too wondrous for the Lord?" (18:14a).²²

²¹ Nahum Sarna, *JPS Tanakh: Genesis*, 117–118 and 359, n. 23; see Chapter 3, n. 57.

²² The JPS translation accurately expresses the import of the Hebrew, *hayippale' meYHWH dabar*, but the first word of the Hebrew focuses on the wondrousness, not on "anything." A more literal translation would be, "Is it (beyond) the power of the Lord [not to do] a thing?"

Although the Kafalenos paradigm can be applied to Gen 18:1–16a and that paradigm indicates that the end-section begins with the messengers' announcement in verse 10, a more satisfying approach is to view the story as a minimal story, as defined by Prince, *A Grammar of Stories*, 24, in which three events are conjoined in such a way that: (a) the first event precedes the second in time and the second precedes the third; and (b) the second event causes the third. Using this structure we get: (1) Abraham sitting at the entrance of his tent; (2) visitors/messengers of God show up; (3) they/the Lord announce(s) that Abraham and Sarah will have a son.

The Kafalenos paradigm for Gen 18:1–16a, Announcement of Birth of a Child to Sarah

A (or a)	<i>Destabilizing event, or reevaluation that reveals instability</i>	[unstated: Abraham does not have child with Sarah]
C	<i>Decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A or a</i>	Three men appear to Abraham, 2.
C'	<i>C-actants initial act to alleviate A or a</i>	Men/ messengers of God announce that Sarah will have a child.
D	<i>C-actant is tested*</i>	Sarah laughs, 12.
E	<i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Lord appears to Abraham.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a</i>	God announces that Abraham will have a son with Sarah, 14.
I, or I (neg)	<i>Success (or failure) of H</i>	God's word ensures success.

* In my discussion of the Kafalenos paradigm in Chapter 2 I noted that when God is the C-actant in these stories the writer does not imagine that God could be "tested" in the

Absence of limits marks the end-section of the J-source Flood story in both the prose and poetic endings. In the prose, God asserts, “*Never again* will I doom the earth because of man” (Gen 8:21). In the final poetic verse, God asserts the continuation of “normal” life, that is, life without another flood; this guarantee is qualified only by the endurance of the earth:

So long as the earth endures
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Summer and winter,
Day and night
Shall not cease.

4.3.2. *Hyperbole*

Hyperbole, a figurative device that exaggerates reality, is a form of unlimited assertion. Hyperbole is not meant to be taken literally, but it creates such a strong impression that it may stop the forward movement of a narrative. The hyperbole at the end of the narrative about the creation of Eve (Gen 2:18–24), that Adam and Eve “become one flesh,” was noted by Robert Alter, who described it as “both a vivid glimpse of the act itself and a bold hyperbole”:²³

Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

In the Cain and Abel narrative, the expression *sevenfold* establishes an unassailable deterrent when God says, “I promise, if anyone kills Cain, *sevenfold vengeance* shall be taken on him” (Gen 4:15). This hyperbolic *sevenfold* is itself multiplied soon after in Genesis (not in the Cain and Abel narrative) when Lamech, a descendent of Cain, declaims: “If Cain is avenged sevenfold / Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold” (Gen 4:24). This assertion by Lamech ends his short speech.

“Numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore”—the vast number of descendants promised to Abraham by God (Gen 22:17)—is a powerful hyperbole, a double hyperbole in fact. It is closural in its context in the *Akedah*, where it follows the near-death of Isaac, and it is part of God’s promise. The expression is an emotionally appropriate response

sense of successfully challenging his ability or power to do something and that a more appropriate term would be “questioned.”

²³ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 31.

to what has transpired; it may be “over the top” but in its context the reader may consider it fair and even reassuring as the story ends. The expression is closural because it supports the new equilibrium: Isaac will live and perpetuate God’s promise to Abraham.

Parts of this double hyperbole are found in other patriarchal narratives, but not linked together as in the *Akedah*.²⁴ The figurative reference to stars occurs twice (Gen 15:5 and 26:4); the reference to sand occurs once (Gen 32:13). In those instances, the hyperbole is closural only when it contributes to or supports the transformation of the story. Thus it is closural in Gen 15, where the stars hyperbole is part of God’s promise of descendants to Abraham, who had feared he would die childless. The other two instances are not closural. The stars hyperbole is part of the promise to Isaac before he leaves for Gerar because of a famine in Gen 26. In Gen 32:13 Jacob quotes God’s earlier promise of offspring, like the sand of the sea, as he is returning to Canaan. In neither of these examples does the hyperbole stop the forward movement of the narrative. Another example of a non-closural hyperbole is the “hundredfold” return that Isaac reaps as a farmer (Gen 26:12). “Isaac sowed in that land and reaped a hundred-fold the same year” is part of the initial equilibrium in the narrative that includes various episodes in Isaac’s life. The hyperbole describes Isaac’s status as the narrative starts; he is blessed by God and is successful.

The evidence for hyperbole as a closural device is similar to several other linguistic features: some literary devices are not inherently closural but become so in certain contexts, like the pun Nod, in the Cain and Abel narrative. A hyperbolic threat of sevenfold punishment to one who would hurt Cain is closural because it stops the action. The double hyperbole in the end-section of the *Akedah* balances the emotional tension in the story and has closural force as it overwhelmingly asserts there will be progeny in Abraham’s future.

4.4. *Tone of Authority*

As a narrative comes to a close, the acceptance of its fair-mindedness and truth contributes to a sense that the story has integrity. Often the narrator, or sometimes a character, assumes a tone of authority and that leads to the

²⁴ In Gen 26:4, the promise of descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven is made to Isaac in the prologue to that narrative; in Gen 32:13, the promise is quoted by Jacob as he entreats God; and in Gen 15:5, the promise to Abraham is in the early part of the narrative.

acceptance of what is being said. The tone may reflect a shift from a different style. Readers or listeners, citizens or soldiers, tend to respect authority, accept its leadership role, and assume the truthfulness of authoritative statements. This is accomplished within the Genesis narratives by a tone of assertiveness or formality, by a lack of emotionalism, by a dependence on logic or logical progressions, by the use of legal terminology, and by the assumption of jurisdiction. The abstract and impersonal tone that was noted at the end of the P-source Flood story conveys a sense of truthfulness because it presents a *fait accompli*: “Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created” (Gen 2:4a).²⁵ In general, the tone of the narrator in the stories conveys authority simply because he has jurisdiction; he is able to access the minds of the participating characters, even God’s, as in the beginning of the J-source Flood story when he reports that God’s “heart was saddened” (Gen 6:5). The use of legal terminology adds to the narrator’s authority in the closing section of Abraham’s purchase of a burial site. Readers tend to accept the truthfulness of information presented in this way.

The term that indicates “I promise” or “upon my word” (*lakhen*) conveys authority in the end-section of the Cain and Abel narrative (Gen 4:15).²⁶ *Lakhen* sets the tone for God’s promise of vengeance, which follows the term: “‘I promise’ (*lakhen*), if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him.” Later in Genesis, in the narrative of Jacob’s sojourn in the east, *lakhen* helps close the brief but tense scene between Rachel and Leah in which they argue over the use of mandrakes (Gen 30:15). Formal use of the term is found in Num 20:12 and 25:12. In both of the examples in Numbers the term *lakhen* introduces a significant decision by God that concludes the narrative, and the effects of those decisions continue into subsequent narratives.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, “therefore” (*lakhen*), you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them” (Num 20:12).

²⁵ The verb “to create” (*b.r.*) is passive in the *niphal* of the infinitive and is used passively. This narrative is also discussed in Section 4.2.2.

²⁶ An analysis of the terms *lakhen* and *'akhen* by Frederic J. Goldbaum, “Two Hebrew Quasi-Adverbs: לַכֶּן and אַכֶּן,” *JNES* 23, no. 2: 132–135, indicates that *lakhen* “forms the function of introducing a vow,” 133. A reasonable translation he suggests is “upon my word.” The word *'akhen* at the beginning of a sentence can be considered a “grunt . . . of realization” and in English it can be substituted by “ah.” An example is Gen 28:16, when Jacob awoke from his sleep (135).

Say, “therefore” (*lakhen*), I grant him [Phineas] My pact of friendship. It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time . . . (Num 25:12–13a).

A tone of authority is also conveyed with the legal term “possession” (*’ahuzza*), although this term is not inherently closural. The term is used in legal texts in the P-source to indicate that laws of land tenure are immutable.²⁷ Baruch Levine explains that according to Leviticus, the land of Canaan belongs to God, who grants it to the Israelites as an *’ahuzza*, a tenured land holding.²⁸ In Gen 17 (also P-source), God promises Abraham that, as part of his “everlasting covenant” with Abraham, “I assign the land . . . to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an ‘everlasting holding’ (*’ahuzzat ’olam*)” (Gen 17:7b–8a). In Gen 23, Abraham is the first (proto-) Israelite to have “possession” (*’ahuzzah*) of land in Canaan. In this narrative, Abraham had first requested that the purchase be considered an *’ahuzzat qeber*, that is, a possession for a burial site when he made his proposal to the people of the land (Gen 23:9). In the closing frame of the story, after it has been formally and legally transferred to Abraham, the land is described as *’ahuzzat qeber* (Gen 23:20). Thus the term “possession” (*’ahuzza*) is closural. It uses an authoritative term to underscore the finality of the new equilibrium: Abraham is in legal possession of land in Canaan.

4.5. *Natural Stopping Points and Their Linguistic Motifs*

4.5.1. *The Motif of Goal Completed*

In two essays that have been constructive for this study, Isaac B. Gottlieb analyzed the ends of books of the Bible and discerned patterns of specific motifs, thematic actions, and the words that typically express them.²⁹ Some of his observations are appropriate only for the larger scope of the works he studied, but some are applicable to the short Genesis narratives, which

²⁷ The word “possession” (*’ahuzza*), although it conveys a tone of legal authority, is not inherently closural, as can be seen in Gen 17:8, 47:2, 11; 48:4; 49:30, and 50:13. Various examples in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are not closural in their uses. In Gen 36:43, a chapter of genealogies, “possession” (*’ahuzza*) is found in the closing section for Esau/Edom.

²⁸ Baruch Levine, *JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*, 168. Both Gen 23 and the Book of Leviticus are P-source texts. Lev 25:23–24 states that the land of Canaan is an “*’ahuzzah*”: “But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land.”

²⁹ Isaac B. Gottlieb, “*Sof Davar*: Biblical Endings,” *Prooftexts* 11, S (1991): 213–224, and, “From Formula to Expression in Hebrew and Aramaic Texts,” *JANES* 31 (2008): 47–62.

are primarily about individuals and their lives. One of his findings is that ends of biblical books thematically complete a chapter in Israel's history.³⁰ He noted, too, that ends of books often relate to the theme of death. And he saw that specific words tend to be associated with the events; that is, he found that on the discourse level of the stories, on the level of how they are told, certain words are associated with certain motifs and themes.

In the Genesis narratives, the stories are presented as personal and not related to Israel's history. Yet, the resolution of national issues found at the ends of biblical books corresponds to the fulfillment of a personal goal in a story about an individual. When an individual establishes a goal in these narratives, it is usually associated with a character's perception that the situation is destabilized and that he wishes to correct it (using Kafalenos's terms). A few examples demonstrate this. In Gen 11:1–9, the Tower of Babel, God is unhappy with the behavior of the people and decides that he will confound the people's speech so they will not understand one another (11:5–7). The goal is achieved: the people's language is "confounded," they stop building the tower and the city, and they scatter from there (11:8–9). In Gen 15, the J-narrative in which God makes a covenant with Abraham, Abraham asks whether he will have his own children who will inherit from him (Gen 15:2–3). God answers him, explaining that he will have his own offspring and they will be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen 15:4–5).³¹ Abraham believes that he can trust in the word of God, as the narrator explains in verse 6, and thus the goal expressed

³⁰ Ibid., 47. Gottlieb notes that Jeremiah's prophecy about the return of Israel in seventy years is fulfilled at the *end* of Chronicles (2 Chron 36:22–23).

³¹ Kafalenos Paradigm, Gen 15:1–21, God's Covenant with Abraham

	Function	Steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Abraham has no children.
a	<i>Destabilizing event, or reevaluation that reveals instability</i>	Abraham is fearful about his childlessness, 2.
B	<i>Request that someone alleviate A or a</i>	Abraham's expresses this fear to God, 2, 3.
C ¹	<i>C-actants initial act to alleviate A or a</i>	The Lord responds to Abraham, 4a.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a</i>	God's words, "Your own issue shall be your heir," ensure that he will have children, 4–5.
I	<i>Success of H</i>	Abraham puts his trust in God, 6.
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	Abraham is assured by God that he will have an heir from his "very own issue."

by Abraham essentially has been achieved.³² The daughters of Lot (Gen 19:30–38) have as their goal the continuation of life on earth (verse 31). The goal is achieved initially as each becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son (36–38). The final verses are an assertion that the goal has been reached, perhaps beyond their dreams; each son becomes the founder of a nation. Abraham's goal of purchasing a plot of land in which to bury his wife in Gen 23 comes to fruition when Ephron accepts payment for the land (Gen 23:16). Yet, looking again at Gottlieb's category in which a biblical book completes a *chapter* in Israel's history, Abraham, like the daughters of Lot, does not live to see the full realization of his goals.

4.5.2. *The Motif of Death and Departure and Language Associated with It*

Gottlieb showed that many biblical books close with the theme of death.³³ The deaths of Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, and Job close biblical books. But in the Genesis narratives, the death of a key figure is seldom the transforming event that causes the establishment of a new equilibrium.³⁴ What is comparable to Gottlieb's observation, though, is the departure of key characters as narratives end. Departure leaves an empty space at the scene of action.³⁵ It is a natural stopping point.

When the key participants in a narrative leave the stage bare after the key transformation in the narrative, the action stops. The narrator no longer talks about changes in the characters' lives or what they are doing, although he may add information about the ending equilibrium or offer some after-history of what has taken place. Shimon Bar-Ephrat collated ending formulas related to departure.³⁶ These include: a person returns home (if we had been told that he had left home and went elsewhere), a person is sent off (or a combination of being sent off and leaving),

³² The balance of the narrative (Gen 15:7–21) is a relatively long two-part epilogue that adds assurance, and thus finality and stability, to the new equilibrium.

³³ Gottlieb, "*Sof Davar*," 214.

³⁴ An exception is the very brief narrative (Gen 35:16–20) in which Rachel dies as she gives birth to Benjamin.

³⁵ Death and awareness of death is certainly not absent from these narratives. Sarah dies and Abraham purchases a burial site for her (Gen 23). The blessing that Isaac imparts to Jacob comes about when Isaac explains, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die" (Gen 27:2). That narrative ends as Rebekah expresses her fear that Esau will kill Jacob, as she says, "Let me not lose you both in one day!" That statement could refer to the loss of both Isaac and Jacob or to the loss of both of her sons if Esau commits the murder and is found guilty (27:45). As noted above, Gen 35:16–20 is a brief narrative that revolves around the death of Rachel as Jacob and his family are returning to Hebron.

³⁶ Shimon Bar-Ephrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 130–132.

and people or groups, who met during the course of the narrative, separate again.

A variation of the departure motif is the iterative action taken by Abraham in the last verse of Gen 12:1–9, after he built altars near Shechem and Bethel. The narrator states, “Then Abraham journeyed by stages toward the Negeb.” This departure includes the mention of ongoing travels by Abraham. But since the narrator does not provide a sequence to those travels nor other distinguishing details, it does not affect or change the transformation. The iterative action functions like a departure motif.

When a story begins with the characters arriving somewhere and ends with them departing, we have a narrative frame. An arrival-departure motif and frame is a powerful delimiter of a narrative.³⁷ The departure indicates that the story has come full circle. In the Tower of Babel story (Gen 11:1–9), the people first “migrated from the east” to settle in a valley in Shinar (2); at the end they are scattered over the face of the whole earth (8–9). Abraham’s first sojourn to Egypt (Gen 12:10–20) begins as he “went down to Egypt” (10) and ends as he is sent off (20). The appearance of the three visitors to Abraham in the first verse of Gen 18:1–16 is framed by the departure of the men in verse 16a.³⁸

Just as Gottlieb identified verbs related to *his* themes, in these narratives certain verbs are identified with the departure motif at the end of a narrative. Verbs include “to go up” (‘*l.h*), “to go” (*h.l.k*), and “to send [someone away]” (š.*l.h*). The first, “to go up” (‘*l.h*), is used closurally when God departs the scene (Gen 17:22, 18:33, and 35:13). “To go” (*h.l.k*) is used about God in 18:33, about Esau in 25:32, about Jacob in 32:2, and twice in Gen 26, when Abimelekh commands Isaac to go, and then he “goes away” in Gen 26:16, 17. When people are *sent* away, the verb š.*l.h* is used, usually in the *piel* form. In the Garden of Eden narrative (3:23), man is sent away, or “banished,” by God, and š.*l.h* is intensified by its connection to both the preceding and following verses. In verse 3:22, God had stated his concern

³⁷ This arrival-departure frame has been discerned in narratives in mishnaic texts. According to Naftali Cohn, “The rabbis, for example, repeatedly emphasize entry into and exit out of the Temple’s sacred space, ritualizing these actions and thus constructing the boundaries of an imagined Temple.” See Cohn’s Ph.D. dissertation, “The Ritual Narrative Genre in the Mishnah: The Invention of the Rabbinic Past in the Representation of Temple Ritual” (University of Pennsylvania, 2007), and an abstract on the Judah Goldin Seminar website at Penn: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jwst/JudahGoldinSeminars.htm>.

³⁸ Gen 18:16, “The men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom, Abraham walking with them to see them off.” The first half of the verse appears to both end the prior narrative and begin the next, a Janus-like function in that it “looks” both ways; the verse provides a transition between the two related stories, Gen 18:1–16 and Gen 18:16–19:33.

that man might “stretch out” (*š.l.h*) his hand and take from the tree of life and eat (the form there is *qal*); in the next verse, 3:24, the verb “to drive out” (*g.r.š*) intensifies the concept.³⁹ Two other verbs, “to go out” (*y.š.ʾ*) and “to be dispersed” (*p.w.š*), relate to a departure at the end; the first describes Cain’s departure (Gen 4:16), and the second occurs twice at the end of the Tower of Babel narrative as the people leave (Gen 11:8, 9).

4.5.3. *Corollaries to Departure: A Return to Someplace or Remaining Someplace*

Two other motifs are related to departures. An individual doesn’t just depart, but *returns* to a place. And, others may leave but the key participant *stays* where he is. In the Hebrew, the words “to return” (*š.w.b*) and “to stay” (*y.š.b*) are commonly found at the ends of narratives and in conjunction with one another. They share key consonants, the sounds *sh* and *b*, and form pleasing alliterations. In some of the stories, Gen 21 and 22, for example, the alliteration of the “*sh*” and “*b*” is complemented by the same sounds in the verb “to swear” (*š.b.ʾ*) and the place name *Beersheba*. This word-play is a very popular way to mark an ending in the Genesis narratives, as the chart “*y.š.b.* (remain, dwell) and *š.w.b.* (turn back, return)” demonstrates.

y.š.b. (remain, dwell) and *š.w.b.* (turn back, return)

#	Narrative	Verse	Sr	Verb	Who, where
1	2:4b–3:24	19	J	<i>š.w.b.</i> 2×	God says to Adam that he will toil all his life, “until you return (<i>šub</i>) to the ground / For from it you were taken / For dust you are / and to dust you shall return (<i>tašub</i>).”
2	4:1–16	16	J	<i>y.š.ʾ</i> * and <i>y.š.b.</i>	“Cain left (<i>wayyešeʾ</i>) the presence of the Lord and settled (<i>wayyešeb</i>) in the land of Nod...”
3	13:1–18	12	J	<i>y.š.b.</i> 2×	Abraham “remained (<i>yašab</i>) in land of Canaan, while Lot settled (<i>yašab</i>) in cities of the Plain.”
4	15:1–21	16	J	<i>š.w.b.</i>	God makes this promise to Abraham: “They [your offspring] shall return (<i>yašubu</i>) here in the fourth generation...”

³⁹ Additional uses of *š.l.h.* that are associated with departures include Gen 27:44, when Rebekah says to Jacob “I will fetch you (*wešalaḥti*)” after she has told him to leave, and Gen 18:16, where it is accompanied by the auxiliary verb *h.l.k.*

Table (cont.)

#	Narrative	Verse	Sr	Verb	Who, where
5	16:1–16	9	J	š.w.b	“And the angel of the Lord said to her [Hagar], go back (<i>šuvi</i>) to your mistress.”
6	18:1–16	10, mid-narrative, at the end of the section in which the messengers are “on stage.”	J	š.w.b 2×	A messenger says, “I will return (<i>šuv ašuv</i>) to you next year, and your wife Sarah shall have a son!” The messengers are not heard from again in this narrative.
7	18:1–16	14	J	š.w.b	God to Sarah: “I will return (<i>ašuv</i>) to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”
8	18:16–19:29	18:33	J	š.w.b	Completion of an episode in which Abraham argues with God (18:16–33) in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative. God departs and then “Abraham returned (<i>šav</i>) to his place.”
9	20:1–18	14, 15	J	š.w.b and y.š.b	“Abimelekh restored (<i>wayyašev</i>) his wife Sarah to him. And Abimelekh said, ‘Here, my land is before you, settle (<i>šeb</i>) wherever you please.’”
10	21:1–21	20, 21	E	y.š.b. 2×	“He [Ishmael] dwelt (<i>wayyešeb</i>) in the wilderness and became a bowman. He lived (<i>wayyešeb</i>) in the wilderness of Paran.”
11	21:22–34	32	E	q.w.m.** and š.w.b	“When they had concluded the pact at Beersheba, Abimelekh and Phicol, chief of his troops, departed and returned (<i>wayyakom</i> , <i>wayyašubu</i>) to the land of the Philistines.”
12	21:22–34	33	E	g.w.r.**	“And Abraham resided (<i>wayyagor</i>) in the land of the Philistines a long time.” *Only example of g.w.r at ending.
13	22:1–19	5, mid-narrative, at conclusion of scene	P	y.š.b and š.w.b and h.l.k.**	“Then Abraham said to his servants, ‘You stay here (<i>šebu-lakhem poh</i>) with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return (<i>wenašuva</i>) to you.’”
14	22:1–19	19	P	y.š.b and š.w.b	“Abraham then returned (<i>wayyašov</i>) to his servants, and they departed together for Beersheba; and Abraham stayed (<i>wayyešeb</i>) in Beersheba.”

Table (cont.)

#	Narrative	Verse	Sr	Verb	Who, where
15	27:1–45	44–45	J	y.š.b and š.w.b 2×	Rebekah says to Jacob, “... Stay (<i>weyašabta</i>) with [Laban] a while, until your brother’s fury subsides (<i>tašub</i>)... until your brother’s anger against you subsides (<i>šub</i>)...”
16	28:10–22	21	J	š.w.b	Jacob’s vow, “... and if I return (<i>wašabti</i>) safe to my father’s house—the Lord shall be my God.”
17	32:4–33	33:16	E	š.w.b	“So Esau started back (<i>wayyašab</i>) that day on his way to Seir.”

* In 4:16 the verb “to leave” (*y.š.*) is alliterative because of the *yod* and the sibilant *š*.

** Three verbs included here thematically support the closural motifs of remaining or leaving but have no alliterative affinities: “to get up” (*q.w.m*) (Gen 21:32), “to stay” (*g.w.r*) (Gen 21:33), and “to go” (*h.l.k*) (Gen 22:5).

Conceptually, the ideas of staying and of returning suggest that what has been occurring is now over; there is an end-point in the process. If there is a *return* (*š.w.b*) to a status or a place after a key transformation in the story, the narrator is suggesting that a cycle or a unit has been completed. God’s admonition to Adam (Gen 3:19) that he will “return” to dust at the end of his life emphasizes that human life ends (and this marks the difference between human life and divine, which lives “forever,” Gen 3:22). At the end of Gen 20:1–18, Sarah is returned to her husband, Abraham, ending the period in which she was held by Pharaoh.

The motif of *staying* (*y.š.b*) or remaining some place (after events of the narrative and then a transformation) indicates inaction; it also suggests that the narrator does not anticipate that much more of interest will occur. In the *Akedah*, Abraham tells his servants to “remain here” (*šebu-lakhem poh*) while he continues on with his son (Gen 22:5). The servants had participated in what may be suggested were “normal” events; what occurs after that point in the narrative is an extraordinary event. Abraham’s command, “You stay here,” marks the threshold between the ordinary and extraordinary. The narrative concludes with the statement that “Abraham stayed in Beersheba;” nothing more of interest is anticipated.

Gottlieb, in writing about the preponderance of *š.w.b* (שוב) and related words in the endings of biblical books, summarizes:

Biblical endings use שׁוּב frequently and generously. The repetition of the root שׁוּב itself or alliteration of its sounds reinforces all these ideas of closing the circle, returning to beginnings, or in the prophetic works, striving for

such return. The word שׁוּב first informs the reader of the approaching end and then satisfies his need for one.⁴⁰

4.5.4. *Words and Motifs that Mean “End” or “Conclusion”*

Two words used by the narrator mean simply end or stop; they are straightforward indicators to the reader that he is at end of the story. The words suggest stability and finality. Both words, “to be complete, at an end” (*k.l.h*) and “to cease, desist” (*š.b.t*), convincingly end the P-source creation story, Gen 1–2:4a. Verses 2:1–3 are:

The heaven and the earth were “finished” (*wayekullu*)⁴¹ and all their array. On the seventh day God “finished” (*wayekal*) the work that He had been doing, and He “ceased” (*wayyišbot*) on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God “ceased” (*šabat*) from all the work of creation that he had done.

The verb “to be complete, at an end” (*k.l.h*) is used in two other narratives; in each instance it marks the completion of God’s remarks. When God bestows the covenant of circumcision upon Abraham, these are the last words before the epilogue in which Abraham performs the ritual (Gen 17:22): “And when He was ‘done’ (*k.l.h*) speaking with him, God was gone from Abraham.” In Gen 18:33, *k.l.h* marks the end of a section of the longer Sodom and Gomorrah narrative; in this scene, Abraham has argued with God to spare the people of Sodom if he can find innocent people there. Then, “when the Lord had finished (*killah*) speaking to Abraham He departed; and Abraham returned to his place.”

These many examples have demonstrated that the biblical authors chose to use specific linguistic devices, motifs, and language as they ended their narratives. The reader attuned to them becomes aware that the author is marking the clausal stages of the story. In the next chapter, I discuss some of the additional markers of closure: culturally specific naming formulas, etiologies, and proverbs.

⁴⁰ Gottlieb, “*Sof Davar*,” 220–221.

⁴¹ In the Hebrew, the verb “he finished” (*wayekullu*) is the first word in this verse.

CHAPTER FIVE

ETIOLOGIES AND PROVERBS

5.1. *Introduction*

Two genres—etiologies and proverbs—serve as devices for closure in the end-sections of many of the Genesis narratives.¹ The ending etiologies are quite common; there are thirty-three of them in eighteen of the stories.² There are four proverb-like statements in end-sections and I examine these to determine whether they can be considered proverbs even though they are not labeled as such.³

For the etiologies, academic studies have focused primarily on two ways of looking at them. The first is by examining an etiology's relationship to the historicity of events in the stories; the second is by examining an etiology's role in validating the story to which it is attached. To these I add another way of viewing them: examining their strategic role in bringing narratives to a close. As for the proverbs, they too have closural roles in end-sections. The identification of the proverbs is complicated, however, because there is little comparable material and one cannot compare them with similar texts or "go into the field" as specialists in proverb studies have done to study how the locals are using an expression in context. Moreover, even if one can identify other biblical texts that are similar, there is no proof that it was already a proverb when it was used in the end-section of the Genesis narrative in which it is found.⁴

Etiologies and proverbs, although they have different styles, content, and contextual purposes, share many characteristics. They function on

¹ The end-section of a narrative, as discussed in earlier chapters, includes the transformation plus additional information that is added by the narrator.

² These are the etiological verses in end-sections of their narratives: Gen 2:3, P; 2:23, J; 2:23, J; 3:14–15, J; 3:16, J; 3:17–19, J; 3:19, J; 3:20, J; 9:12a and 17b, P; 11:9a, J; 16:11, J; 16:13, J; 16:14a, J; 16:15, P; 19:22b, J; 19:36, J; 19:37, J; 21:31, E; 21:33b, E; 22:14, R; 26:33, J; 28:19, J or E; 31:47–8, E; 32:3, E; 32:31, E; 32:33, E; 33:17, E; 33:20, E; 35:7, E; 35:8, E; 35:15, P; 35:20b, E; 38:29, J; 38:30, J.

³ The proverb-like statements are Gen 2:24, 16:12, 22:14, 34:31.

⁴ G. L. Permyakov, *From Proverb to Folktale: Notes on the General Theory of Cliché*, written in 1968 and translated from the Russian in 1979, establishes criteria for proverbs and proverbial phrases according to their linguistic structure, their internal logic, their images, and their modal forms.

the discourse level of the narrative, that is, *how* it is written. They relate information that is connected to the story but not necessarily intrinsic to it and are usually presented after the causative events of the narrative have been completed. Each can form a temporal or conceptual bridge to the reader, bringing the events of the narrative closer to a later time or understanding. They can be flattering to readers, since they give the reader credit for certain knowledge or information that is alluded to or mentioned. They are related to each other in that an etiology can provide the “reason for” a proverb.

5.2. *Etiologies*

5.2.1. *Introduction to Etiologies in Genesis*

By definition, an etiology answers a question. According to the OED, an etiology is “the assignment of a cause, the rendering of a reason.”⁵ Etiologies state the result of a series of events that led to a certain condition or caused a particular name to be what it is. Why do people speak so many languages? Why are people afraid of snakes but not of squirrels? Or, why does a place have a name that sounds both like the number “seven” (*šebaʿ*) and the word “oath” (*šebuaʿ*)? Within the Genesis narratives, these actual questions are never verbalized. Compare, just for a moment, the fanciful *Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling.⁶ The stories themselves begin in the “once upon a time” mode, and no etiological question is asked within the body of the stories. Yet, Kipling alerted the reader as to what question he would be answering through the story’s title: “How the Whale Got His Throat” or “How the Camel Got His Hump” or “How the First Letter Was Written.” Each story draws to a close as Kipling concludes his answer. In the Bible, although the question is only implicit, when the etiological answer is offered by the writer, the “answer” signals that now is a logical time to end the narrative.

Consider these examples: People speak so many languages *because* God confounded their speech, as explained at the end of the Tower of Babel narrative (Gen 11:8–9). People are afraid of snakes *because* God established enmity between people and serpents because of the actions of Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden, in the end-section of the Adam and

⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, “Aetiology.”

⁶ Rudyard Kipling, *Just So Stories for Little Children*.

Eve narrative (Gen 3:14). Beersheba was given its name *because* Abraham gave seven (*šeba'*) ewes to Abimelekh in Beersheba and the two of them swore an oath (*šebua'*) (Gen 21:30–31); and, later, Isaac and Abimelekh also exchanged oaths there (Gen 26:33).⁷

Three etiologies function closurally in the narrative in which Jacob wrestles with a divine being (Gen 32:23–33). The etiologies end the action of the story; they mark their role with specific language; and, they affirm the narrative's credibility. In the story Jacob is alone at the Jabbok River and a man or divine being wrestles with him until the break of dawn. When the being sees he has not prevailed against Jacob, he wrenches Jacob's hip at its socket and strains it.⁸ As dawn breaks, Jacob asks for his blessing and the divine being changes Jacob's name to Israel (32:29). He departs,⁹ and Jacob leaves the encounter limping.

The end-section begins when Jacob's name is changed to Israel (Gen 32:29). In this transforming step in the narrative the divine being says, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for (*ki*) you have striven (*s.r.*) with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." This establishes a new equilibrium: "Jacob" becomes "Israel." Jacob and Israel are identified as the same person, son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham, and now designated as the progenitor of the nation of Israel. For readers, this transformation is a familiar process; God had personally changed the names of Abraham and Sarah, and now Jacob's name is changed as well.¹⁰

The latter two etiologies occur "outside of the plot," that is, after the transformation. They place additional brakes on the action of the story because they are descriptive and add information to which readers, ancient and modern, could or can connect. They include word markers

⁷ In Hebrew the word "Beersheba" is a combination of two elements, *be'er*, meaning "a well," and "*sheba*," related to the number seven and also the word for "oath."

⁸ The unnamed person, 'iṣ, is described as a "divine being" (*elohim*) in verses 29 and 31.

⁹ After Jacob's name has been changed, he asks the divine being for *his* name; the divine being refuses and then departs. The second half of the verse in the Hebrew, ויברך שם אֱתוֹ שָׁם, can be translated as "and there he blessed him" (Robert Alter, *Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*, 181) or as "he took leave of him there" (NJPS, 68). Speiser, *Genesis*, 254–255, argues that this is not a blessing because that occurred earlier in the change of name.

¹⁰ In the Genesis narratives, Abraham's name is changed from Abram by God in Gen 17:5; Sarah's is changed from Sarai in 17:15. Chapter 17 is a P-source narrative. In a later narrative, the P-source marks Jacob's change of name to Israel, Gen 35:10. Gen 32:23–33 is attributed to the E-source.

typical of etiologies at the ends of narratives—the verb “to name” (*q.r.*’), the conjunction “because” (*ki*), and the phrases “that is why” (*‘al ken*) and “until today” (*‘ad hayom*).

The first of these explains the punning name that is given to the place where the confrontation occurred. The narrator explains, “So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, ‘[Because] (*ki*) I have seen a divine being face to face (*p.n.h* and *‘El*), yet my life has been preserved.’” In addition to being a pun, “Peniel” was a place ancient readers could have been aware of. In the biblical histories, the city Peniel/Penuel is mentioned in Judg 8:8, 9, 17, and 1 Kings 12:25, and the use of this name lends credibility of place to the story.¹¹

In the last etiology, the narrator first observes that as the sun rose after the confrontation, Jacob/Israel walks off “limping on his hip.” The narrator uses linguistic markers of an etiology as he explains, “That is why (*‘al ken*) the children of Israel to this day (*‘ad hayom*), do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since (*ki*) Jacob’s hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle” (Gen 32:33). The narrator also draws upon information he assumes that readers, “the children of Israel,” were familiar with—the tradition of not eating the hindquarter of an animal.

In the following pages, I present a brief overview of the pertinent scholarship on etiology. I then demonstrate how specific etiologies at the ends of their narratives contribute to closure by ending the action of a story, adding a sense of truthfulness, providing an authoritative verification or objective affirmation of an event, affirming readers’ values or knowledge, and providing entertainment with puns and literary allusions.

5.2.2. *Biblical Etiologies: Scholarship*

Scholarly interest in etiologies has been fairly extensive. In the mid-twentieth century, much of the scholarship related to two issues, the identification and forms of etiologies and the textual history of narratives that contained etiologies. More recently, scholars have also examined some of their rhetorical functions.

(a) *Identification and Forms of Etiologies.* Hermann Gunkel first identified etiologies as a biblical genre, or *Gattung*, the role of which was to

¹¹ Both spellings are found in references in Genesis, Judges, Kings and 1 Chronicles. Anson F. Rainey and R. Steven Notley, in *The Sacred Bridge: Carta’s Atlas of the Biblical World*, 115, identify Penuel as the administrative center in Transjordan for the Northern Kingdom of Israel when it was newly established (1 Kings 12:25).

explain or legitimize certain phenomena. He identified two basic types of etiologies: legends, which explained why things were a certain way, and motifs, which explained why something or someone had a particular name.¹² Building on the basic delineation of this form, Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth approached etiologies and etiological narratives (the latter meaning those narratives where the entire story seems to point to a reason for a phenomenon) somewhat in the manner noted previously for Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. They assumed that ancient writers began with a contemporary condition and created narratives that would explain the condition. Much of their research was based on the sagas and narratives in the Book of Joshua. A debate ensued. Opposing the Alt-Noth approach, others argued that etiologies were attached to independent historical traditions or existing narratives that may have been written or oral. John Bright, building on the work of W. F. Albright, stated:

*Where historical tradition is concerned, not only can it be proved that the aetiological factor is often secondary in the formation of these traditions, it cannot be proved that it was ever primary.*¹³

The Bright-Albright argument was supported by the research of I. L. Seeligmann, who studied the relationship between narratives in Jubilees and those in Genesis. Seeligmann noted that in Jubilees, etiological elements were added to stories that did not have them in Genesis; he inferred from this that in a similar manner, the etiological element in biblical narratives could have been added to extant stories.¹⁴ The validity of this approach

¹² Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, xviii–xxi. Studies that have followed, including those by Burke O. Long in *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament* and by Friedemann W. Golka in “The Aetiologies in the Old Testament,” *Vetus Testamentum*, review the scholarship up to their publication dates. Timothy D. Finlay, *The Birth Report Genre in the Hebrew Bible*, 1–22 and 24–31, provides a more specialized but more recent overview.

¹³ John Bright, *Early Israel in Recent History Writing*, 91. One example that Bright offers is that of Gen 25:1–6, in which Jacob is given a name. There, he states that it is probable that the etiological factor is responsible for only a single detail of the story, and therefore it is likely that the story developed from motifs far older than the etiology, 93.

¹⁴ I. L. Seeligmann, “Aetiological Elements in Biblical Historiography,” *Zion* 26 (1961): 151–153. In Jubilees, biblical events are connected with the Jewish religious calendar. For example, Noah's offering and God's assurance that there would never be another flood occurred in the third month (Jub. 6:1), the rainbow as the sign of the covenant occurred on the holiday of Shavuot (Jub 6:17), and Abraham's building of an altar at Beersheva was accompanied by significant offerings and established the holiday of Sukkoth.

was demonstrated by Burke O. Long and Brevard S. Childs in their monographs on formal structures in etiologies.¹⁵

An analysis of the formal structure of etiologies was proposed by Johannes Fichtner, who found that there were basically two forms of marked etiologies. Form I reports a naming (Peniel, for example, in the Jacob/divine being story above), and it always uses a form of the verb “to call” or “to name” (*q.r.*), which he stated had no “functional” connection to the narrative material; it merely uses wordplay to connect to the narrative.¹⁶ Form II always uses the expression “that is why” or “therefore” (*‘al ken*), which makes a logical inference between what has occurred in the narrative and the phenomenon (usually a place name); it may also complete a wordplay. The etiology at the end of the Tower of Babel narrative, for example, does both (Gen 11:1–9). In the end-section of the story, the narrator explains that the city is named “Babel” (root letters *b.b.l*) because God “confounded” (*b.l.l*) the speech of the whole earth. The reason for the food prohibition in the Jacob/divine narrative story also fits into this category. Long identified many variations in this dual schema.¹⁷

To the list of linguistic etiological markers noted by Fichtner, that is, “to name/to call” (*q.r.*) and “therefore” (*‘al ken*), Childs added the expression “to this day” (*‘ad hayom hazeh*).¹⁸ The three are often used together, with variations. The verb “to call” can be in the perfect (Gen 11:10) or imperfect tense (Gen 22:14); it is usually in the *qal* verbal pattern, but may be *niphal* (Gen 22:14). The expression “to this day” may omit the word “this” (Gen 35:20); the formula may modify the verb (Gen 26:33) or the object of the verb (Gen 19:37, 38). Fichtner notes that when all three expressions are used, “to this day” functions as a frequentive, that is, it indicates that the phenomenon is ongoing, continuing through the time of the writing. Childs suggests that this may be similar to how it was used in other ancient

¹⁵ Long, *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament*, 87–94; Brevard Childs, “A Study of the Formula, ‘Until This Day,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 279–292.

¹⁶ Johannes Fichtner, “Die Etymologische Ätiologie in den Namenbüngen der Geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testaments,” *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956), 372–396.

¹⁷ Long, *The Problem of Etiological Narrative*, 86. Long also discusses etiologies that use the term “sign” (*‘ot*) in P-source material (65–78); these etiologies “recall . . . permanently something of specified content and report in the priestly view of God’s ordering of the world,” 66.

¹⁸ Childs, “A Study of the Formula, ‘Until This Day,’” 279–282. Childs also sought to show that there was a pure or original form for etiologies and that, over time, this form exhibited a “breakdown.” He argues that these less pure forms were later additions to the biblical text, 285–287.

literature. In Herodotus he found that a similar formula adds Herodotus' personal testimony to a received tradition.¹⁹

Friedemann W. Golka proposed classifying etiologies based on how they function in their narratives.²⁰ The first group was "etiological narratives," that is, narratives in which the whole narrative seems directed toward answering a specific question. When Jacob sets up a pillar, anoints it, and names the site Bethel (House of God) in Gen 28:10–22, the etiology is the culmination of the fact that Jacob recognizes the holiness of the place and the events that occurred there. Other narratives that Golka includes in this category are Gen 13, which explains why the clans of Abraham and Lot live in different areas; Gen 16, which explains why Abraham's son Ishmael lived apart from Abraham's family; and Gen 19:30–38, which explains the origin of the tribes of Moab and Ammon. He does not include the Jacob/divine being narrative among the etiological narratives (Gen 32:23–33).²¹

The second classification is those etiologies that do not "govern" the entire narrative. One example of this type is the naming of Peniel in the Jacob/divine being narrative (Gen 32:31). Golka observes that there can be multiple etiologies of this type in a narrative, as there are in Gen 32 . . . The Sodom and Gomorrah story has three etiologies.²² The third category is that of "etiological notes." Golka includes reports, genealogies, and lists in this group.²³ An example is the list of the names of Jacob's children in Gen 29–30.

Some etiologies in end-sections are not marked by formulaic words in their narratives, or at most use the word "because" (*ki*). In the Adam and Eve narrative, there is no formulaic language when God explains that Eve

¹⁹ Ibid., 292, Childs found similar formulas in Polybius, I Maccabees, Livy, and Plutarch. Dan Ben-Amos, in a personal communication on Sept. 4, 2007, suggested that the expression "until today (*'ad hayom*)" may represent a ritual of society, a validation of what is referred to.

²⁰ Friedemann W. Golka, "The Aetiologies in the Old Testament," Part I, 410–428; Part II, 36–47. In the second part of this study, Golka also tries to ascertain during what period of Israel's history these etiologies were written and comes to the conclusion that it was primarily during the time of the Israelite tribes, 44.

²¹ Golka, "The Aetiologies," Part II, 38, does not include Gen 32:33 among the etiological narratives because he believes that the injunction against certain foods was a "primitive taboo" and would have predated the writer and been unknown by him; the story itself would have been developed without knowledge of the origins of the custom.

²² Ibid. Part I, 418. The three etiologies in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative are the explanations of why the two cities are no longer in existence, how Zo'ar got its name, and why there is a pillar of salt in the region.

²³ Ibid., Part I, 419–20.

will have pain in childbirth and be ruled by her husband, yet this is understood by the reader as the narrative's explanation for why these occur. In contrast, within the same narrative the explanations of punishment for the serpent and for Adam are both marked by "because (*ki*)" and the frequentive "all the days of your life" (*kol yamei hayyeikha*). In the P-source creation narrative, the seventh day is blessed and holy "because" (*ki*) God rested from all his work. The explanation that the rainbow is the sign of the covenant between God and mankind is not marked by formulaic words, but rather by a unique alliterative phrase, "This is the sign of the covenant" (*zo't 'ot habrit*) (Gen 9:17).²⁴ The concept of the tithe is introduced at the end of the narrative of Jacob and his dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10–22), but here too there is no overt formulaic statement of its relation to earlier or later tradition.²⁵

(b) *Rhetorical Role of Etiologies*. More recently, it has been suggested that etiologies may be present primarily for rhetorical reasons and not to answer a question or relate to historical issues. P. J. van Dyk suggests that etiologies' prime function is often to affirm the credibility of the narrative itself and its symbols; moreover, he adds, they are there to entertain the reader. Van Dyk suggests this role is the most likely one when certain conditions are present:²⁶ (1) the etiology falls outside of the plot of the narrative; (2) the etiological elements include something that the reader is likely to approve of; and (3) more than one etiological element is found in the narrative. These conditions are common in the Genesis narratives with the exception that while it is possible to make assumptions about the knowledge of ancient readers, it is often difficult to discern what they would have "approved of."

If we look at the Jacob/divine being narrative discussed previously, we see that the rhetorical value of its etiologies generally fulfill the conditions noted by van Dyk. First, there are multiple etiologies and two of the three are outside of the plot itself. Ancient readers who would have identified with Jacob through the name Israel would likely have been happy to see that Jacob's name was changed by a divine being, as Abraham and Sarah's

²⁴ In Gen 9, the phrase "this is the sign of the covenant" (*zo't 'ot habrit*) opens and ends the epilogue to the P-source Flood story, forming a closural frame. In the P-source Gen 17, the "sign" (*ot*) of the covenant is circumcision, but it is not closural in the narrative.

²⁵ Perhaps the tradition of the tithe is suggested as an etiology in Gen 14:20 when Abraham pays a tithe to King Melchizedek.

²⁶ P. J. van Dyk, "The Function of So-Called Etiological Elements in Narratives," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102, no. 1 (1990): 26–27.

had been changed. Readers who were already familiar with the concept of not eating meat from the hindquarter of an animal would be pleased upon hearing about the divine involvement that supports the tradition.

The Genesis etiologies add truthfulness, authoritative verification, and objective affirmation; they affirm prior knowledge and entertain with puns and linguistic etymologies. All of these attributes contribute to their role in bringing closure to their stories, as is demonstrated below.

5.2.3. *Closural Aspects of Etiologies*

(a) *Adding Truthfulness.* One of the most important closural aspects of a narrative is that at the end, the reader accepts the truthfulness, or at least the credibility, of the story he has read.²⁷ In these narratives, truthfulness can be perceived on many levels as seen in the story about Jacob and divine being (Gen 32): that of social reality, of tradition, or of known names and places. “Biblical stories are meant to appear as historical events that really occurred,” explains Yairah Amit.²⁸ In the stories related in the primeval history (Gen 1–11), Tikva Frymer-Kensky points out, “social reality is given a history.”²⁹ The reality of the conditions that those etiologies explain—of relations between men and women, of the need to work, of pain in childbirth, of the fact that people live all over the world and speak many different languages—lends credibility to their stories (Gen 2–3, 11).

The truthfulness implied by an etiology becomes especially valuable if the story has incredible elements. When a writer uses the conventional forms and language of an etiology it suggests to readers that the etiology

²⁷ Elliott Oring, “Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth,” *Journal of American Folklore* 121, no. 480 (2008): 130–159, a study based on transcribed oral texts from Western Europe and the United States, presents a broad outline of rhetorical tropes that contribute to a sense of veracity. The narrative must be consistent with the audience’s characterizations, morals, and ethics; it must also be “rhetorically true.” Rhetorical truth is achieved through a sense that the source has authority and judgment; that there is logic in the narrative and it has credible details; and that it is consonant with the audience’s emotions, cognition, moral values, and beliefs. Details in etiologies, discussed in this section, lend credibility to their stories.

²⁸ Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, 8. Although she is not discussing etiologies, Amit discusses ways in which the writer gave specific details to a narrative to make it appear more real, including, for example, specific geographical details with which people could identify. She notes as well the unusual presence of God in some stories, which adds authority.

²⁹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth*, 23, 111–113. Adam begins as a “simple servitor of the land” in Gen 2, and the next ten chapters follow “humanity’s development, through the human accumulation of godlike knowledge,” 108.

is providing truthfulness, just as it does in more “historical” narratives. When Jacob wrestles with a divine being, it is difficult to see how a human being would wrestle with a divine being and have a physical wound as a result. Yet, a food prohibition that connects back to this “event” and to Jacob’s resulting injury, plus the naming of the precise location where this occurred, lends an air of reality to the story. In the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative the desolate topography of the region around the Dead Sea lends credibility to the destruction of cities that had been there; the area’s salt accumulations and columns suggest there may be some truth to the episode in which Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt (Gen 19:26). In the story of Lot’s daughters (Gen 19:30–38), the assumption that the readers would know who the Moabites and Ammonites were lends credibility to that narrative. In these tales, the writer has added information in the etiology that lends integrity to the whole story.

(b) *Authoritative Verification*. Childs points out that the presence of an authoritative attestation enhances the credibility of an etiology. In these stories the narrator, and even more so, God, are the ultimate authorities.³⁰ In the Creation story the narrator observes that on the seventh day of creation, God blessed the day and made it holy, and God “‘ceased’ (š.b.t) all the work of creation” (Gen 2:3). The explanation that God himself “‘ceased” (š.b.t) work is authoritative and lends validity to the laws and the tradition that “Shabbat” (*šabbat*) is a day of rest for the Israelites.³¹ Later in Genesis, an angel of God first bestows the name Ishmael on Hagar’s son (Gen 16:11). The angel explains the meaning of the name Ishmael (š.m. ‘ + ’ El), invoking elements from the narrative: “For the Lord has ‘paid heed’ (š.m.‘).” A few verses later in the narrative, in the P-source addition to this story, Abraham also names him (16:15). These authoritative etiologies are effective because of the assumption that the name Ishmael and the Ishmaelites were known to the readers.

Additional authority can be discerned if naming reports are read with the nuances that Dana M. Pike suggests. He investigates the formula “That

³⁰ Childs, “On that Day,” 283, credits Herodotus with using this technique.

³¹ Exod 31:16–17, “The Israelite people shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time; it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth; and on the seventh day He ceased (*šabat*) from work and was refreshed.” Also Deut 5:12–14, “Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God. . . .” The tradition of Shabbat as a day of rest is noted, for example, in Jer 17:21–27 and Amos 8:5.

is why *it* is called X" (*'al ken qara' X*).³² This type of naming report is often understood to have an indefinite subject, meaning that people *in general* call something by that name, suggesting a reality that was contemporary with ancient readers. In some circumstances, however, the report can be understood to have a definite subject, "That is why *he* called it X." In the latter case, the namer is identified and given credit by the narrator. When understood this way, the formula shifts the emphasis to an authority, the namer who pronounced a name for something when the event occurred.

The power of this approach to reading the Hebrew can be seen in the Tower of Babel narrative. The verse in question (Gen 11:9) is usually translated as "That is why *it was called* Babel (*b.b.l*), because there the Lord confounded (*b.l.l*) the speech of the whole earth..." Pike suggests an active, not a passive reading, with God as the subject: "*He [God] called it* Babel (*b.b.l*), because there the Lord confounded (*b.l.l*) the speech of the whole earth..." This gives "greater polemical punch to the message of the narrative."³³ The satire and pun (of *b.b.l* and *b.l.l*) is enhanced because it is God who not only confuses the people's language and then scatters them, but also purposefully (and disdainfully) mispronounces the name of the result.

(c) *Objective Affirmation*. When a concrete phenomenon that arose or was first identified during the course of the events is identified, the truth of what happened in the narrative appears objective. The serpent crawls on its belly—readers' can clearly see that—and that contributes to the integrity of the story of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:14–15). People speak many different languages—that contributes to the integrity of the Tower of Babel story (Gen 11:1–9). The well at which the angel of God spoke to Hagar and told her of her son's future is named and its coordinates are noted, in case the reader wants to check out the truthfulness of the account (Gen 16:14). The topography of the region around the Dead Sea corroborates the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19). The site of Rachel's death is marked by a pillar (*maṣṣebah*), and the narrator asserts that even "until today" (*'ad hayom*), one can see that marker on the road to Bethlehem (Gen 35:16–20). The location of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac is an affirmation of the event (Gen 22:14). Abraham names the place "The Lord will see" (*Adonai-yireh*), commemorating the event that occurred there. The narrator supplies an additional proof: this site is the

³² Dana M. Pike, "Biblical Naming Reports with על כן קרא."

³³ Ibid., 430.

source of “the present saying, ‘On the mount of the Lord there is vision’ (*ye’amar hayom behar YHWH yera’eh*).” These references are presented in each case as objective and verifiable, lending veracity to the stories that precede them.

(d) *Prior Knowledge Reaffirmed*. Readers are comfortable when they already have knowledge of names, places, values, and traditions that are referred to in etiologies; they are then more likely to accept what has been written. Values and traditions that are mentioned are “an affirmation of one’s own knowledge or value system,” van Dyk noted.³⁴ References to Shabbat and to the origin of the name Israel, noted previously, are positive reinforcements of the values found in the Genesis stories. Places that readers know may also enhance their interest, just as hearing the name of one’s hometown or a place one has visited kindles interest. The mention of specific names can also serve as a mnemonic. Etiological references to Beersheba (Gen 21:31, 26:33), Bethel (Gen 28:19, 35:7, and 35:15), Gilead (Gen 31:47–8), Mahanaim (Gen 32:3), and Sukkot (Gen 33:17) can remind readers about the events of the story whenever they hear the name of the place.

(e) *Puns and Literary Etymologies*. Puns are common in these etymologies; they close many narratives with a smile. Puns in context depend on homonyms that are formally identical or similar; they are effective when the relationship between the words relates to material in the narrative. The closural effect of puns has been noted for poetry by Barbara H. Smith, who demonstrated that puns are common closural devices, especially if they affirm some expectation of the reader or enhance the effect of another closural device. Their wit, she explains, makes the reader “delighted, as it were, to see [himself] catch the ball each time.”³⁵

Punning is common when someone or something is named.³⁶ After Hagar is saved by an angel, God tells her that the child’s name will be Ishmael, “for (*ki*) the Lord has paid heed (*šema’*) to your suffering” (Gen 16).³⁷

³⁴ P. J. van Dyk, “The Function of So-Called Etiological Elements,” 26.

³⁵ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, 168.

³⁶ Witty etiological puns for naming children are common in these narratives, but may fall into Golka’s category of “aetiological notes,” which includes reports, geologies and lists; see note 18 above. Jacob’s children, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, and Joseph, have names connected to the meaning of a linguistic component of their names in Gen 29 and 30. However, these references do not provide closure to the Jacob saga. Some of the names conclude episodes. The name Asher, for example, concludes an episode (Gen 30:13).

³⁷ This punning etymology is one of three etiologies in the end-section of Gen 16; the other two are Hagar’s name for God and the naming of the well where Hagar was saved.

The name Ishmael is composed of the verb “to hear” (š.m.ʿ) and “God” (ʿEl). “Ishmael,” in addition to being entertaining, affirms God’s compassion for Hagar. The etiology also helps stabilize the narrative by concretizing God’s promise to Hagar at the end.

Punning etymologies do not have to be grammatically or lexically correct to make their closural points.³⁸ Similarities in sound may be enough, as in the example from the Tower of Babel narrative where the Hebrew root letters *b.b.l* and *b.l.l* are “confused” by the author (Gen 11:9). The result crystallizes God’s ability to nullify the human arrogance presumed in building that city because it satirizes the name of the great Mesopotamian city Babel (*b.b.l*) by associating it with “meaningless gibberish” (*b.l.l*).³⁹ The word for “woman” (ʿiššah from the root שׁנא) has a different root than the word for “man” (ʿiš from the root שׁא). Yet in the embedded Adam and Eve story, when Adam says, “This one shall be called Woman, for (*ki*) from man she was taken,” the wordplay reprises the formation of the woman from the rib of the man. The etiology of the Woman also supports the transformation in the story. It anticipates the proverb that closes the narrative: “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” (Gen 2:23–24).⁴⁰ In the end section of the surrounding Adam and Eve narrative, the actual name that Adam gives to the woman is “Eve” (*hawwah*) (Gen 3:20). The etymology provided for her name, “She was the mother of all the living” (*hai*), may even be a double pun, that is, if as has been suggested, it ties back to the encounter between the woman and the serpent.⁴¹

(f) *Summary: Closural Aspects of Etiologies.* Etiologies contribute to a sense that the narrative is over. Their presence is most often signaled by formulaic language (“that is why,” “he named it/it is named,” “because,” and “until today”). An etiology may be part of the narrative’s transformation or follow it, but because it is descriptive in nature, it halts the

³⁸ Pike, “Biblical Naming Reports,” 417, quotes Moshe Garsiel, that “the liberty taken by the biblical authors in these explanations has been termed by some scholars ‘folk etymology.’ Such a definition misses the point; the explanations function as a literary device and are designed to enrich the literary unit.”

³⁹ Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Commentary, Genesis*, 84.

⁴⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 28, suggests that the poetic words of Gen 2:23, “bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh . . .,” may perhaps be an “etiological tag in circulation for centuries.”

⁴¹ Sarna, *JPS Commentary, Genesis*, 29, notes that although the Hebrew *havvah* [*hawwah*] seems to be an archaic form of *hayyah*, there may be wordplay on the Aramaic word for “serpent,” as noted in Genesis Rabba 20:11 and 22:2; in the Sefire inscription (1.A.31), the word for serpent is written *hvvh* [*hwwh*].

narrative action in a story and becomes a signal that the events are over. This is especially evident when a narrative ends with two or even three etiologies. When etiologies are part of the transformation, they may answer implied questions, like “how did Jacob get the name Israel?” When etiologies connect to known places or traditions, they flatter readers who have related knowledge, and they take readers from the time of the narrative events to a recognizable time or place closer to their own, a process that also indicates that the narrative is complete. Etiologies verify the accuracy of narratives—or at least lend credibility to them—when they connect to known traditions, social reality, or the characteristics of an animal, a topography, or a known place. The puns and literary wordplays within them provide entertainment at the end and support values previously established in the narrative. All of these elements contribute to the clausal functions of etiological devices.

5.3. *Proverbs as Clausal Devices*

5.3.1. *Proverbs in the Genesis Narratives*

Compared to the many etiologies at the ends of narratives in Genesis, there are only a few short pithy statements in these narratives that can be identified as proverbs, and none is designated in the text with the traditional term *mašal* or “proverb.”⁴² The four ‘likely’ proverbs are:

- Gen 2:24—“Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.”
- Gen 16:12—“He shall be a wild ass of a man; / His hand against everyone / and everyone’s hand against him.”
- Gen 22:14—“On the mount of the Lord there is vision.”
- Gen 34:31—“Shall our sister be as a whore?”

⁴² Outside the academic study of proverbs, the term ‘proverb’ is sometimes used interchangeably with the term ‘saying.’ The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines a saying as something “commonly said, a proverb.” The term proverb is differentiated by its inclusion of the traditional proverbs/sayings found in Wisdom literature. Within the academic literature of paremiology, or the study of proverbs, one can differentiate between proverbs which consist of stable elements in a closed sentence, and proverbial phrases which are open and may have an ellipsis for the pronoun or subject; see G. L. Permyakov, *From Proverb to Folktale*, 10–12.

There are verses in Genesis that lack the word *mašal* but have nonetheless been identified by biblical scholars as proverbs, and those are not in the end-sections of their narratives. They are:

- Gen 2:18a—"It is not good for man to be alone."⁴³ This introduces the embedded narrative in which the woman is created.
- Gen 10:9—"Hence the saying, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter by the grace of the Lord.'"⁴⁴ This is part of a two-verse genealogical reference in the list of the descendants of Noah.
- Gen 19:9—"The fellow came here as an alien and already he acts the ruler!"⁴⁵ This is embedded in the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah.

5.3.2. *Proverbs: Scholarship*

(a) *Theoretical Foundations and 1 Sam 10:12.*

Proverbs give us as clear an idea as we can hope to get about the forces that influence men and the ideals that they hold. Their range is limited to rather commonplace observations, but most of us are rather commonplace, too. In difficult situations men turn to proverbs for answers, and they find them there.⁴⁶

Archer Taylor, the author of this quote, has been described as the "grand master" of proverbs.⁴⁷ He and other scholars have identified a large number of defining characteristics of proverbs: their structures, literary patterns, authoritative stances, and subtle rhetorical roles. The findings of

⁴³ Galit Hasan-Rokem, "And God Created the Proverb . . . Inter-generic and Inter-textual Aspects of Biblical Paremiology—or the Longest Way to the Shortest Text," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, 107–117, discusses the relationship between the text and the proverbs in Gen 2:18 and Gen 2:24.

⁴⁴ Carole R. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament: A Contextual Study*. In her 1982 review of the literature on proverbs, Fontaine identifies this as a folk proverb first identified by Otto Eissfeldt, in "Der Maschal im Alten Testament," *BZAW* 24: 48–49. Gen 9:10 exemplified "common experiential truths," 7. Her analysis of this proverb is on p. 238.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 21. Fontaine makes reference to this but questions its inclusion.

⁴⁶ Archer Taylor, "The Wisdom of Many and the Wit of One," 9. Wolfgang Mieder in his Introduction to *The Proverb and an Index to "The Proverb."* With an Introduction and Bibliography by Wolfgang Mieder describes Taylor as the "grand master" of the international study of proverbs, or paremiology, v.

⁴⁷ Aspects of proverbs that were introduced or surveyed by Archer from the 1920s through his death in 1973 include the origins of proverbs (from terse sayings and platitudes, from narratives, folk-verse, individual authors, and from biblical and classical verses); content of proverbs; and structure of proverbs and proverbial phrases; see the Bibliography, xl–liii in Taylor's *The Proverb and an Index to "The Proverb."*

these scholars are applicable to the large collections of proverbs identified ‘in the field’ and also to those found in literary contexts. In order to decide whether the Genesis proverb-like statements are indeed ‘proverbs’, we can compare them to the characteristics defined by these scholars and by biblical scholars who have specialized in proverbs. I examine these criteria first by examining a biblical proverb that is identified in the text as a *mašal*, the word that is commonly translated into English as “proverb.”⁴⁸

In 1 Samuel 10:12, the words “Is Saul too among the prophets?” bring to a close the episode in which Saul is anointed as king. The words, presented as a question, are identified as a proverb:⁴⁹

As [Saul] turned around to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart; and all those signs [that God had previously promised to him] were fulfilled that same day. And when they came there, to the Hill, he saw a band of prophets coming toward him. Thereupon the spirit of God gripped him, and he spoke in ecstasy among them. When all who knew him previously saw him speaking in ecstasy together with the prophets, the people said to one another, “What’s happened to the son (*ben*) of Kish? Is Saul too among the prophets?” But another person spoke up and said, “And who are their fathers?” Thus the proverb (*mašal*) arose, “*Is Saul too among the prophets?*”⁵⁰

The proverb, as related in the narrative, repeats the words asked by an observer at the scene. It also sums up what has occurred: prophets, after all, are appointed or inspired by God—as Saul has been—and the people

⁴⁸ Elsewhere in the Bible *mašal* is used to indicate a proverb, in Ezek 17:2, 18:3, 24:3; in Mic 2:4 (there it appears to refer to a poem); in Hab 2:6, where it is parallel to “epigram” (*meliša*) and “riddle” (*hidot*); and in Ps 44:15. In 1 Kgs 5:12 “*mašal*” is used to refer to the proverbs composed by King Solomon. In the Book of Proverbs 1:6 itself the term is parallel to *meliša*.

⁴⁹ The ability of a proverb to be declarative, imperative, or interrogative was noted by G. L. Permyakov, *From Proverb to Folktale*, 14. A question also ends the Book of Jonah, in 4:11–12, after God has decided to spare the city of Nineveh and Jonah leaves the city. When the plant that had shaded him dies and Jonah is distraught, God asks Jonah “And should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!” The use of a negative adverb within the question presumes a positive response: “Yes, you should save the city.” The authority and values espoused by God leave no room for a different response.

⁵⁰ In 1 Sam 19:24, there is a parallel use of the proverb, with an alternative explanation of the origin of “Is Saul too among the prophets?” As noted earlier, P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., see p. 26, *The Anchor Bible: I Samuel*, suggests that this section is part of a late addition to the narrative that puts Saul in an unfavorable light, even a “kind of parody of 10:10–12,” 330–331.

observe that he is “among,” that is, part of the community of prophets.⁵¹ Yet the words also have a negative cast, implied by the interrogative form of the statement and by a perception by the people, noted by scholars, that Saul would have been an unlikely participant in the activities of prophets.⁵²

Alan Dundes has shown that structurally a proverb can be viewed as an equation with two parts, and here the two parts are “Saul” and “prophet.” As Dundes explains, proverbs identify the two parts either as equivalent or in opposition to one another. Either A equals B (this is an identification of the two parts) or A does *not* equal B (the two parts are oppositional). There may also be a combination of these.⁵³ The Saul proverb seems to equate the two parts, that is, ‘Saul’ *equals* ‘prophet,’ and at the same time to question that equivalence. The interrogative form, added to issues of Saul’s reputation as an antagonist of the prophets, casts doubt on this identification. It suggests an unresolved opposition in the situation.⁵⁴

The opposition to Saul’s behavior is leavened because it is presented as a quote, not as the narrator’s own creation. By quoting in this way the message is depersonalized. The criticism, though authoritative, appears less threatening.⁵⁵

The Saul proverb, which repeats an observer’s words, is also a manifestation of the quality that Joyce Penfield describes as “quoting behavior.”⁵⁶ Proverbs bring to a narrative a sense that the statement did not originate with the narrator nor, if it is in a dialogue, with the individual who uttered it. It seems as though a “third party” or even a “foreign subject” “intruded” into the context.⁵⁷ “Is Saul too among the prophets?” reflects

⁵¹ The NJPS, 590 n. *g-g*, notes, “To refer to a person merely as ‘the son (*ben*) of . . .’ is slighting; cf. [1 Sam] 20:27, 30, 31; Isa. 7:4.”

⁵² McCarter, *I Samuel*, 183–184, notes Saul’s reputation as an antagonist of the prophets, the slighting reference to Saul as the “son” of Kish, and the intensive particle *gam*, which marks the name Saul. McCarter states that the Samuel passage explains the origin of the saying but does not give any direct information about its meaning.

⁵³ Alan Dundes, “On the Structure of the Proverb,” in *The Wisdom of Many: Essays on the Proverb*, 965–968, 988.

⁵⁴ P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *The Anchor Bible: I Samuel*, suggests that this section is part of a late addition to the narrative that puts Saul in an unfavorable light, even a “kind of parody of 10:10–12” (330–331). He does not consider the last line a ‘proverb.’

⁵⁵ Shirley L. Aurora, “Proverbiality,” *Proverbium*, 1 (1984):1–381.

⁵⁶ Joyce Penfield, *Communicating with Quotes: the Igbo Case*, 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17–20; Penfield draws from the foundational work of Jan Mukařovský. A selection of Mukařovský’s writings is translated from the Czech on pp. 96–104. Penfield’s work is based on fieldwork among the Igbo people in Nigeria; Mukařovský’s frame of reference is literary.

the community's evaluation; the narrator merely relates 'what is being said.' The wisdom of the community, accumulated over time, is brought to the event. This means of subtly adding an authoritative criticism is a characteristic of proverbs.⁵⁸

The listener's perception that what he is hearing or reading is part of a tradition is another key element for identifying a proverb.⁵⁹ It is this aspect that makes determining the presence of proverbs that are not labeled as such in the Genesis stories more complicated. Yet, as described above, proverbs are identifiable in other ways: by their equational nature; by their ability to be interrogatives as well as declaratives or imperatives; by their 'quoting' aspect; and by the rhetorical elements that lend authority and truthfulness.⁶⁰ In addition, proverbs tend to stand out stylistically in their contexts and may use archaic lexicons, rhythms, and unique grammatical structure.⁶¹ Because of all these factors biblical scholars have asserted the presence of proverbs in biblical narrative even without the imprimatur of the Hebrew word "proverb."

(b) *Biblical Scholarship on Proverbs*. Studies of proverbs in biblical narrative settings have built on the studies of Otto Eissfeldt and Carole R. Fontaine, among others. Eissfeldt included in the *mašal* genre, as he named it, both wisdom sayings and popular adages, that is, folk proverbs that appear in narratives.⁶² According to Eissfeldt, the message of a folk proverb is conveyed through a picture or example that provides an illustration for the hearer; examples are drawn from a variety of spheres, including animal, plant, and family life. He wrote that the popular proverb historically developed over time into a "later [and more] artistic saying" or *mašal*, which is a two-line wisdom saying.⁶³ Fontaine, who noted that subsequent scholars questioned the "simple-to-complex" theory of development from folk sayings to wisdom literature,⁶⁴ introduced the perspective of folklore

⁵⁸ Shirley L. Aurora, "Proverbiality," 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁰ Elliott Oring, "Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth," 127–166, explains that the authority of the source, the logic of the statement, and the reader/listener's own knowledge or beliefs contribute to the perception of the truth of a statement.

⁶¹ Dan Ben-Amos, Review of *Communicating with Quotes: The Igbo Case*, 226.

⁶² Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 81–87.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁴ Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings*, 7, pointed out that other scholars who examined earlier Egyptian wisdom materials brought the concept of development from simple to more complex or artistic forms into question.

and anthropology to the study of biblical proverbs. She also suggested that these sayings would have been used in a performance context.⁶⁵

The roots of proverbs and other materials in folklore that were orally composed were noted by Susan Niditch, who nevertheless admits that “all of us who have worked in this area agree that one can never truly know whether or not . . . individual pieces of Israelite literature were orally composed or based on oral compositions.”⁶⁶ Dan Ben-Amos places a further caveat on the folklore origin of this material. He shows, in a discussion of five narratives in the Book of Numbers, that the narrative material has been thoroughly adapted by the writer/editor to reflect his own views.⁶⁷

There may be a way out of the difficulty of establishing that a statement is a proverb (and especially if it is not associated with the term *mašal*). Galit Hasan-Rokem has suggested that other factors associated with the statement are important: (1) it transfers the specifics of the situation to a conceptual level; (2) the language is a poetic summary; (3) it dramatizes a conflict, relates it to a cultural tradition, and then relieves it; and (4) its deep meaning can be gleaned from its context and contiguity, that is, its syntax is with the narrative rather than in the specific sentences of the proverb.⁶⁸ If it is a proverb, its sentences were generated at an earlier time. The proverbs that are discussed here are weighed against these criteria as well as those of the more generalized studies of proverbs discussed above.

5.3.3. *Closural Aspects of Proverbs in the End-Sections of Narratives*

- *Gen 2:24*. “Hence (*‘al ken*) a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.”

This statement is found at the end of the embedded creation of Eve narrative. Robert Alter has commented on the proverbial nature of this verse.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Ibid., see especially 72–138.

⁶⁶ Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible*, 6, explains that the sample of poetic texts is too small to allow one to test for formulaic composition in the style of the scholarship of Lord, 7.

⁶⁷ Ben-Amos, “Comments on Robert C. Culley’s ‘Five Tales of Punishment in the Book of Numbers,’” in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, 35–46.

⁶⁸ Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Proverbs in Israeli Folk Narratives: A Structural Semantic Analysis*, 11, 18–19, 53.

⁶⁹ Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 31. It “might well have been part of a proverbial statement adopted verbatim by the writer. . . .”

Hasan-Rokem devotes a complete study to it together with Gen 2:18 and points out that the two verses form a frame around the creation of Eve story.⁷⁰

The words “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh,” meet at least three of the four criteria suggested by Hasan-Rokem for discerning the presence of a proverb. The verse elevates the specifics of the creation of Eve to a conceptual level. This single woman becomes the paradigm for the intense relationship between men and women. Aspects of the language are poetic: after the introductory “Hence,” two phrases begin with an opposite, “to leave” (‘.z.b) and “to cling to” (d.b.q).⁷¹ The two phrases coalesce into the final hyperbole, “they become one flesh.” The figurative aspect of the words “leave” and “cling” dramatize a conflict in society, exemplifying the “social reality” that occurs when a man transfers his prime loyalty from his parents to his wife.⁷² By verbalizing the conflict of loyalties that a husband may feel, the proverb can relieve the pressure that he feels by demonstrating that his feelings are universal and not unique.⁷³ Therefore, this should be considered a proverb.

The proverb is closural in several ways.⁷⁴ First, its introductory phrase, “that is why” (‘al ken), is a regular marker in the end-section of a narrative that commonly introduces an etiology at the end, as discussed above. Second, the verse goes beyond the causal event of the plot, which was to resolve man’s lack of a “fitting helper.” The reference to mother and father brings the narrative onto a new temporal plane and into the future, when people *do* have mothers and fathers, unlike Adam and Eve. Its poetic

⁷⁰ Hasan-Rokem, “And God Created the Proverb . . .,” 35–45.

⁷¹ Ruth Finnegan, “Proverbs in Africa,” in *The Wisdom of Many*, 16–23, comments on the poetic quality and form of the proverbs used in African societies; see also more generally, Ben Amos, Review of *Communicating with Quotes*, 226.

⁷² Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, 22. The role of proverbs in African societies to smooth over difficult societal situations is noted by Finnegan, “Proverbs,” 28–29; Penfield, *Communicating with Quotes*, 6.

⁷³ Finnegan, “Proverbs in Africa,” 27, also notes the sense of detachment and generalization inherent in proverbs. “The speaker stands back, as it were, from the heat of the actual situation and draws attention, for himself or others, to its wider implications.”

⁷⁴ In the New Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh*, this verse is the last in its unit, although it is not the last verse in the chapter. Harry M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah*, 22, 62, points out that paragraphing in the NJPS *Tanakh* sometimes disregards the chapter divisions if other factors override them. Because the issue of nakedness belongs with 3:7 and 3:21, not with Chapter 2, the NJPS attaches 2:25 to Chapter 3, the start of the next unit.

elements, the opposing verb pair and the visual image of the two people as one, are a pleasing way to end a narrative. And, it uses hyperbole.

- *Gen 16:12*. “He [Ishmael] shall be a wild ass of a man; / His hand against everyone / and everyone’s hand against him.”

The narrator, after the angel of God has convinced Hagar to return to Sarah from whom she fled, says this to Hagar regarding her son Ishmael. Fontaine identifies this as a proverb, or more precisely as “a proverbial phrase,” and categorizes it as such because it is a description drawn from the sphere of animal life.⁷⁵ The Hasan-Rokem categories support Fontaine’s identification. The proverb transfers the specific personality of Ishmael to a conceptual level; he will be a personality-type, a fighter and a loner. The second and third parts of the verse, which summarize a life of conflict, are poetic. “His hand against everyone/ and everyone’s hand against him” repeats short alliterative words and sounds in the Hebrew. The words “hand” (*yad*) and “all” (*kol*) are repeated, as are the sounds “o” and “b”: *yado bekol / weyad kol bo*.

A clausal aspect of this proverb is that the allusion to the Ishmaelites reaches beyond the narrative to a time closer to that of readers. As with etiologies, this movement to a future time suggests that the actions of the narrative are over; the writer has completed his discussion of the events. The proverb explains to readers, who would be aware of the historical difficulties between Israel and its Ishmaelite neighbors, that this problem was already indicated in the womb. Moreover, its poetic attributes are a change from the preceding prose style.

- *Gen 22:14b*. “Whence the present saying (*’ašer ye’amer*), on the mount of the Lord there is vision’ (*r.ʾh*).”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings*, 238, analyzes this proverb, which was first identified by Eissfeldt.

⁷⁶ The Hebrew *’ašer ye’amer* can also be translated as “whence it is said,” a more literal translation than the NJPS used above. “Whence it is said” reflects the Hebrew construction that begins with the conjunction “whence” (*ašer*), followed by the imperfect passive form (*niphal*) of “to say.” See Gesenius, §166b, 505 for the use of *ašer* introducing a consecutive clause with the imperfect or jussive, meaning “so that,” in *Gen 22:14*.

The translation “there is vision” reflects an ambiguity in the text based on how the verb *r.ʾh*, “to see,” is vocalized and thus does not clarify whether it is God or the person who comes to the mountain to see/be seen; see Sarna, *Genesis*, 154, and Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 111. The verb “to see” may also reflect a popular etymology for the name of the mount on which the sacrifice is to take place, the land of Moriah (*Gen 22:2*). For discussion of alternative etiologies for the name Moriah, see Sarna, *Genesis*, 391.

After the transformative near-sacrifice of Isaac in the *Akedah*, Abraham names the site where it took place “Adonai-yireh,” (“the Lord will see” [r.ʾh]).⁷⁷ Immediately following, the narrator adds the half-verse, “On the mount of the Lord there is vision.” Since that phrase is identified in the text as something that is (frequently) said, one feels comfortable looking at this as a proverb that equates a numinous quality with a place. Gesenius indicates that the verb form “it is said” (*ye’amer*) introduces a proverbial expression.⁷⁸

Yet, oddly, this verse is not identified as a proverb by Eissfeldt, Fontaine, or Hasan-Rokem, despite the fact that “whence it is said” is practically a label. The somewhat similar syntax of the beginning of Gen 10:9, “Hence the saying (*‘al-ken ye’amar*),”⁷⁹ ‘Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter by the grace of the Lord,’” is identified as a proverb by Fontaine and Eissfeldt, possibly because of the presence of the *‘al ken* adverb or because of the folk-oriented subject, that Nimrod was a “mighty hunter.”⁸⁰

The *Akedah* saying fulfills Hasan-Rokem’s criteria for a proverb. It transfers the specifics of the situation to a conceptual level; it refers to the fact that people know that there is a special place, on God’s mountain, from which “there is vision.” The repetition of “to see” (r.ʾh), first as part of the place name and also within the saying, emphasizes the role of “seeing.” That might suggest that at that place, Abraham’s action was seen or understood in its complexity.⁸¹ One can only infer that the saying might relate to a cultural tradition; perhaps it refers to other times in which God “saw/understood” an individual on that mountain. Its meaning in another context would help explain a deeper import, but that is not available.⁸²

The saying is closural. It follows the transition in the story, it is descriptive, and it helps to halt the action of the narrative. Perhaps for ancient

⁷⁷ NJPS, 40. The Hebrew “will see” and “there is vision” use the same consonants; only the vocalization of the consonants r.ʾh differs.

⁷⁸ GKC, §107g, 316.

⁷⁹ The final vowel sound in *ye’amar* in Gen 10:9 is short *a*, because of the presence of an *etnahta* accent mark, which separates two halves of a verse. In 22:14 there is no *etnahta* under the verb, and the verb form is *ye’amer*.

⁸⁰ See n. 75. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings*, 238, analyzes this proverb, which was first identified by Eissfeldt.

⁸¹ The Septuagint has a different tradition and renders this verse, “And Abram called the name of that place ‘The-Lord-saw’ that they might say today, ‘on the mountain the Lord appeared.’”

⁸² Hasan-Rokem explains, as noted previously, that because a proverb uses sentences generated at another time, its deep meaning should be gleaned from its context and contiguity, that is, its syntax within the narrative, not its meaning in the specific sentences of the proverb.

readers the mention of this saying prompted other memories that would contribute to closure as well.

- *Gen 34:31*. “Shall our sister be as a whore?”

The final verse in the end-section epilogue in the narrative of Dinah (*Gen 34:1–31*) is a question asked by Simeon and Levi of their father. In the story Dinah had been abducted by Shechem, son of the local chief. To get her back her brothers use subterfuge and convince Shechem and the townspeople to become circumcised; then, when they are at their weakest, the brothers devastate the town and all its inhabitants. In the final scene, after the brothers have brought their sister back, their father Jacob confronts Simeon and Levi. He takes them to task for over-reacting, which could bring about the destruction of him and his family by their more powerful neighbors. The question/proverb is the brothers’ response.

Although this verse is not singled out as a proverb or saying in the scholarly literature, according to Hasan-Rokem’s criteria it has qualities that suggest it may be a proverb. It transfers the specific situation to a conceptual level. The individual (“our sister”) has been assigned to a group to which she does not belong.⁸³ If she were a whore, the brothers would react differently and suggest that she should be punished or banished from the family.⁸⁴ Their interrogative statement dramatizes their conflict with their father but lessens its harshness by couching it as a question that draws its authority from communal values.

The final verse statement about Dinah is similar to that asked about Saul: both succinctly ask a question having to do with the inclusion of an individual in a particular group and both implicitly reject their inclusion.⁸⁵ Hasan-Rokem points out that to *understand* a proverb one must re-state it affirmatively.⁸⁶ This suggests that Dinah’s brothers are saying, “Our sister

⁸³ The similarities and differences between this verse and the proverb about Saul are discussed below and in n. 85.

⁸⁴ In *Gen 38:24*, when Judah erroneously believes that his daughter-in-law Tamar is pregnant by “harlotry” (*z.n.h*), he says, “Bring her out . . . and let her be burned.” *Proverbs 6* and *7* indicates the harsh attitude of society against women who are whores/harlots.

⁸⁵ The Hebrew in the two examples is structurally different:

I Sam 10:12: “Is Saul too among the prophets?” הגם שאול בנביאים

Gen 34:31: “Shall our sister be treated as a whore?” כזונה יעשה את-אחותנו

⁸⁶ Hasan-Rokem, *Proverbs in Israeli Folk Narratives*, 19. She explains that the “syntactic surface-structure does not rightly represent the proverb as a meaningful sentence.” Thus she would have looked at the question “Is Saul too among the prophets?” in I Sam 10:12, “Every X is *not* among the prophets.”

is *not* a whore,” just as the people in the Saul episode were saying, “Saul is *really* not a prophet.”

Closurally the verse adds high drama and openness to the ending.⁸⁷ It addresses a challenging question to Jacob, the head of the clan, and it hangs in the air and baits the reader to respond and to participate in the dialogue he has just witnessed. Yet, if this verse is a proverb it is one that is not particularly poetic in nature, nor is it built around a famous or prominent individual as was the proverb about Saul; it is simply a statement about “our sister.”⁸⁸

5.3.4. *Proverbs as Closural Devices: A Summary*

Despite the difficulty of ascertaining what is a proverb, there are three likely examples of the four suggested: “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” (Gen 2, of Adam and Eve); “He shall be a wild ass of a man; / His hand against everyone / and everyone’s hand against him” (Gen 16, of Ishmael); and “Whence it is said ‘On the mount of the Lord there is vision’” (Gen 22, after the near-sacrifice of Isaac). The three use poetic and figurative language, use quoting formulas, are equational, and have authority based on the values of the community. Each dramatizes a situation, expresses tension, and helps dispel the tension by relating it to a broader cultural tradition. The fourth, regarding Dinah, “Shall our sister be as a whore?” has affinities with the Saul proverb. It also appears to mask the harshness of its intent by posing a question whose answer would be found in the authority of the community. But its lack of poetic elements or abstraction or formulaic signs of quoting suggest that it is likely not a proverb.

The three proverbs are closural. Each halts the forward movement of the narrative. Each transfers the reader’s attention to a future time or a conceptual level. By diffusing tension each contributes to the stability and closure, and each employs a stylistic change in the narrative.

⁸⁷ The anti-closural aspects of the end of Gen 34 are discussed in Chapter 7.

⁸⁸ The larger implications of the brothers’ question and how issues of honor, ethics, and moral values leave the story with an air of uncertainty are discussed in Section 7.7.3.

5.4. *Summary*

The closural effects of these two genres have been demonstrated. They lend credibility to their stories by connecting to knowledge the reader is presumed to have and bringing him from the time of the narrative to a later point or understanding, or to his own time. They entertain and edify the reader as a narrative is ending. Both forms, because they are usually placed after the transformation of the narrative and are descriptive, create a barrier to the forward movement of the narrative flow.

In the next chapter, I discuss rituals that occur at the ends of their narratives. These too serve as brakes on the forward movement of a narrative, but their primary action is upon the participant in the story.

CHAPTER SIX

RITUALS AT THE ENDS OF NARRATIVES

6.1. *Introduction*

In eighteen of the thirty-eight short Genesis narratives the key character participates in a ritual, and sometimes in more than one, in the end-section.¹ The ritual action is special, different and apart from his normal activities. After the ritual is concluded the key character doesn't get involved in further activity except for occasionally "moving on."² The ritual can occur between the character and the divine or between the character and someone else in the civil sphere or it can mark a life-cycle event such as circumcision, marriage, blessing of children, or death and burial. The rituals—the term is defined shortly—contribute to closure on two levels, first in the context of the story itself and then on the discourse level, that is, in how the narrative is presented. The rituals appear in each of the documentary sources in Genesis and are embedded in narratives that have various themes and goals.

I left discussion of this closural device until now because rituals are more complex in their enactment, in how they are described, and in how they are structured in their narratives than the forms and devices discussed in earlier chapters. The descriptions of rituals also often include repetitions, formulaic language and motifs, etiologies, and frames. The rituals, because they are activities, always bring about some change in their stories. Some are the transforming event of the narrative, but most occur after the transformation. The Kafalenos paradigm that outlines the steps in a plot can be helpful in showing where the ritual occurs relative to the story's transformation.

¹ The end-section of a narrative is composed of the transformative action that re-stabilizes the conditions in the story allowing a new equilibrium to be established; most narratives include additional information that does not change the new equilibrium, and that is part of the end-section as well. See Chapters 1 and 2 and especially Section 2.2.2.

² The iterative nature of 12:9, which is seen after Abraham builds two altars, was discussed in Chapter 3. The verse does not change the final equilibrium in which Abraham is moving about the land.

The descriptions of the rituals can be extremely brief in their contexts. Sometimes just a few words are related and these are essentially a synecdoche in which a part is used to symbolize the full event. Sometimes the reference to a ritual is formulaic, as when the narrator states that Abraham (or Isaac or Jacob) “built an altar there.” In those instances slight additions or changes to the formula may be significant. The description of the altar that Noah builds (Gen 8:20–22), for example, does not have the adverb “there.” That omission is consistent with the lack of specific geographic locations in the Noah story and in the primeval history. In contrast, the other altars that are built in Genesis are anchored to specific locations in Canaan. Abraham builds one altar near Shechem and another between Bethel and Ai (Gen 12:7, 12:8). A unique name for God is introduced in another brief ritual, when Abraham plants a tree at Beersheva and invokes “the Lord, the Everlasting God,” “YHWH ‘El ‘Olam” (Gen 21:33).

I use the term ritual following the guidelines suggested by Catherine Bell, an influential scholar in this field.³ Bell’s approach allows events to be understood as rituals even if they lack the formality and stylization of the rituals found, for example, in the legal and ritual priestly texts of biblical books. She describes a ritual as a specialized and nuanced way of acting that contains “value-laden distinctions.” It is effective in its own culture.⁴

When Noah builds his altar at the end of the J-source Flood story he demonstrates these characteristics. The ritual occurs after the destruction of the world by forty days of rain (Gen 8:6–12). After he pragmatically checks whether the land is dry by sending out a raven, a dove, and finally a dove that does not return, he acts in ways that are beyond those of his normal daily activities. In a new place—off the ark—he builds an altar

³ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Among those who credit Bell’s importance are David P. Wright, “The Study of Ritual in the Hebrew Bible” in *Hebrew Bible, New Insights*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn, 120–140, and *Ritual in Narrative: The Dynamics of Feasting, Mourning, and Retaliation Rites in the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat*; Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible*; and Simon B. Parker, Review of Wright’s *Ritual in Narrative*, *JAOS* 122.1.1 (2002): 123. Bell’s influence on Saul M. Olyan’s *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* is discussed later in this chapter. Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 239, writes that “Catherine Bell concentrates on generalities rather than on detailed analysis of specific rituals.” My friend and colleague Susan Marks first suggested that I look at Bell’s work for this chapter.

⁴ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 90.

and offers animals upon it. His actions are appropriate in his culture as it is described in Genesis:⁵

Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking of every clean animal and of every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar.

The concepts and nuances of the J documentary source are reflected in the mention of the altar and the offerings.⁶ The offering is effective: God is satisfied with Noah's action and rewards him with the promise not to destroy the earth again because of man.

There has been extensive study of rituals and of rituals in the Bible; here the focus is on how those rituals shed light on the narratives in which they are embedded, specifically on how they contribute a sense of completion to their stories. In this chapter I describe first how ritual has been understood in biblical studies. I describe Bell's place within the field of ritual scholarship and those of her contributions that are valuable for this study. In recent years scholars have drawn from her work as well as from that of David P. Wright, Saul M. Olyan, Deborah H. Roberts, and Francis M. Dunn to show how writers in the ancient Near East and Classical Greece and Rome had narrative strategies that they expressed through ritual.⁷

⁵ This occurs in Gen 8:20. The appropriateness of making offerings to God in the J-source primeval stories is initially demonstrated in Genesis in the Cain and Abel story (Gen 4). In that narrative, God accepts Abel's offering and pays no attention to Cain's offering (Gen 4:5), indicating that the process is not a *quid pro quo*. No reason is given to explain why Cain's "fruit of the soil" (Gen 4:3) is not acceptable to God.

⁶ Different types of rituals are found in the J and P documentary sources. J-source narratives have rituals in which an altar is built to God. Sometimes a ritual refers to offerings that are made; Gen 4 (Cain and Abel) refers to "the fruit of the soil" and "the choicest of the firstlings of his flock"; Gen 8:20, discussed here, refers to "burnt offerings" of every "clean animal" and "clean bird." The P-source does not refer to altars or sacrifices until the revelation at Sinai. However, P-source texts refer to different rituals, including the ritual of circumcision, which is the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17 and 21:4). In the E-source narrative of Gen 31–32:3, after Jacob and Laban make a treaty between themselves, Jacob alone offers up a sacrifice (יָזַבֵּחַ).

In his analysis of Exodus 20:22–26, which is attributed to the E-source and occurs in the context of the Sinai revelation to Israel, Jeffrey H. Tigay explains how the construction of an altar is part of a complex of verses that forbids idols, prescribes the construction of earthen (or unhewn stone) altars, the offering of sacrifices, and the invocation of God's name; there God will bless Israel. The altars are the material locus or symbol of God's presence. Similar prescriptions are found in each of the Bible's main legal corpora. See Tigay, "Presence of God and Coherence of Exod 20:22–26," in *Sefer Moshe: Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume*, 196–211. In the J-source narratives in Genesis the proscription against idols is not mentioned at all.

⁷ Works by these scholars are detailed in the discussions that follow.

After these discussions I examine the Genesis rituals and how they affect their narratives. I show how they are closural, contributing to the finality, stability, and integrity of their stories. Sometimes they relate life-cycle events, or social or political hierarchies, or involve the divine. Sometimes they connect with the characters' (and readers') innate sense of the natural stopping places in life. They may also "balance accounts" between participants, a phenomenon that relates to a sense of fairness. It will also be interesting to compare these rituals with those relatively few rituals that are not in the end-sections of their stories to see how those function in their stories.

6.2. *The Term "Ritual" and Its Use in Biblical Scholarship*

6.2.1. *Overview*

In a 2008 essay on recent developments in the study of biblical ritual, David P. Wright observed that over the years researchers have had difficulty in defining ritual. Their definitions depended on their perceptions of formality, stylization, and repetition; he added that "researchers have often noted that one knows ritual when one sees it but that it is otherwise difficult to define."⁸

Nevertheless, there have been many attempts to define ritual.⁹ Studies beginning in the nineteenth century drew from anthropology and sociology and generally were adjuncts to an interest in religion.¹⁰ The myth and ritual school included James Frazer, whose *Golden Bough* was influenced by Darwinian concepts of evolution and saw in ritual the enactment of foundational religious myths. Rituals then could be used to describe religion. Emile Durkheim expounded a sociological understanding of religion, suggesting that religion creates a coherent society and provides a way to organize that society. The phenomenological approach emphasized the importance of comparative studies and recognized that rituals could occur in non-religious contexts. A "functionalist perspective" was utilized by various scholars, including Victor Turner, Claude Lévi-Strauss,

⁸ David P. Wright, "The Study of Ritual," 8.

⁹ Summaries of the extensive literature in ritual studies can be found in Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible*, 23–69; in Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 14–66; and in Frank H. Gorman, Jr., "Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies: Assessment of the Past; Prospects for the Future," *Semeia* 67 (1994): 13–20.

¹⁰ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 14.

and Mary Douglas. In these systems, ritual functions “as a form of non-verbal communication and is able to transform a person or object from one realm to another [realm]. In this approach to ritual, the ritual serves to say things and should be deciphered as linguists would decipher an unknown language.”¹¹

6.2.2. *Milgrom and Others*

For the Hebrew Bible, Jacob Milgrom played a dominant role in analyzing and explaining priestly rituals and laws. Milgrom “has illuminated the Priestly ritual system in both its details and its larger conceptual structures and categories. . . . demonstrat[ing] the vitality and theological importance of the Priestly ritual materials.”¹² In his *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus*, James W. Watts places Milgrom’s theoretical approach within the context of Emile Durkheim’s sociological understanding of religion, which explains that “societies generate their own symbolic representations.”¹³ In addition to Milgrom, scholars such as Baruch Levine, who introduced the term “descriptive” to reflect the formulation (rather than the function) of ritual texts in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient texts, and Menahem Haran have been influential contributors.¹⁴

6.2.3. *Biblical Ritual Using Categories Designated by Catherine Bell*

(a) *The Process of Ritual*. Catherine Bell has suggested that the attempt to define ritual, whether through a search for universal qualities or through categorization of types of rituals, is less useful than asking these questions: “Under what circumstances are such activities distinguished from other forms of activity? How and why are they distinguished? What do these

¹¹ Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*, 38, groups these scholars under the rubric “functionalist perspective.”

¹² Gorman, “Ritual Studies and Biblical Studies,” 13–36.

¹³ James W. Watts, “Introduction,” *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus*, 5.

¹⁴ Baruch Levine, “The Descriptive Ritual Texts from Ugarit: Some Formal and Functional Features of the Genre,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, eds. Carol L. Meyers and M. O’Connor, 468. Jacob Milgrom, in *Leviticus 1–16*, 134, describes the sacrificial procedures as prescriptive in Chapters 1–7 and then descriptive in Chapters 8–9. Menahem Haran, in *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel*, distinguished between the open sacred cultic areas in ancient Israel and the temples, or Houses of God. He explored four dimensions of the cultic activity in the temples, “place (or institution), time (or occasion), act (or ceremony) performed, person (or personnel) performing it.”

activities do that other activities cannot or will not do?"¹⁵ In fact, she prefers the use of the term "ritualization" over ritual because of its emphasis on practice and activity. Bell explains ritual in these terms:

[Ritualization is] a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities. As such, ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the "sacred" and the "profane," and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors.¹⁶

What is important in a ritual is the *process* that the individual engages in within the context of his culture. The process is not logical, but is rather "situationally effective."¹⁷ The ritual defines (or "distinguishes," in Bell's terms) those realities thought to transcend human power. If we look again at the end-section of the J-source Noah story, we see that Noah, after having survived the Flood, reaches beyond his "world" to the realm of the divine. His activity brings about a commitment that only God with his power can offer—that the world will not again be annihilated because of man's behavior. In the Noah story the ritual process is between man and God. Most of the other Genesis rituals, including those between individuals or groups, also have a component that involves God and his power, but the laconic descriptions do not always verbalize that.

Bell argues that ritual, or ritualization, should not be used to *explain* religion, society, or culture. Ritual is not a 'language' that needs to be deciphered; it is not thoughtless action that can be distinguished from conceptual aspects of religion. Ritual is also not a mechanism that integrates thought and action within a religion. "It is designed to do what it does without bringing what it is doing across the threshold of discourse or systematic thinking."¹⁸

(b) *Hierarchy*. Bell observed that rituals can establish a hierarchy between individuals, "creating and articulating interpersonal power relationships."¹⁹ Building on this concept, Saul M. Olyan examined cul-

¹⁵ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 70, 74. Bell points out that some social scientists have used her approach to explain rituals in non-religious frameworks, 88.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54, 19, 20, 93.

¹⁹ Wright makes this observation in "The Study of Ritual," 134, and he attributes the insight to Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 69–73.

tic and quasi-cultic biblical texts in the Bible and found ways of acting that reflected the opposition of such terms as clean/unclean and holy/common.²⁰ He demonstrates that binary thinking in the biblical texts confers status and hierarchy *upon* the people who *participate* in the rituals.

Hierarchy and “international” importance are articulated in a ritualized meeting between Abraham and two of the kings with whom he is allied in the end-section of Gen 14. In that story, Abraham as a military leader saves his nephew Lot and residents of Sodom who had been seized by a different group of kings with their armies. After Abraham’s victory, two kings, Bera’ of Sodom and Melchizedek of Salem, a “priest of God Most High,” come out to meet Abraham. Melchizedek brings bread and wine, and he blesses Abraham (14:18–20a). Abraham gives him a tithe of the spoils of war.²¹ Then the king of Sodom says he will take the persons captured and he offers the booty to Abraham (14:21). When Abraham refuses that offer, explaining that he would not have that king say that *he* had made Abraham rich, he is denying the king of Sodom a hierarchical position superior to his own. Abraham’s importance and relative power among these kings is established in this ritual scene.

(c) *Verbal Component*. Bell does not ignore the language component of many rituals, but she points out that it is not the words themselves that are unique; the context elevates them.²² Words that are used in non-ritual contexts become special when they are part of ritual contexts in the Genesis narratives, where many of the rituals have a verbal component, such as a prayer, a vow, or a salutation. For example, the verb *b.r.k* can mean “to greet” or “salute” or “to bless.” It is a salutation when Laban says “*b.r.k*” to his daughters as he departs on his journey home (Gen 32:1); many years later in Egypt, Jacob’s *b.r.k* to the Pharaoh is again a salutation as he departs (Gen 47:10).²³ In ritual contexts, as in Gen 14, it only means

²⁰ Saul M. Olyan, *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult*.

²¹ In 1 Sam 8:5, 17, the right to take a tithe is identified as one of the prerogatives of a king.

²² Bell, *Ritual Theory*, explains, “certainly ritualization makes ample use of words in prayers, vows, recitations, speeches, songs, and the like. . . . [Yet] whereas the use of language or a particular mode of speaking does not appear to be intrinsically necessary to ritual as such, the opposite does hold—namely, that ritualization readily affects the way language is used and the significance it is accorded. . . . [The words are] performative in their particular context, 112–113.

²³ Harry Orlinsky, in *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah*, 113, on Gen 32:1, clarifies these dual uses of this verb. As noted earlier in Chapter 5, n.6, Speiser suggests that in Gen 32:30 the verb *b.r.k* should be translated as “he [the divine being] departed.” That translation is used in NJPS.

“to bless.” Melchizedek is a priest of God Most High; his words are spoken in the context of a ritual offering of bread and wine; the words he utters are special, structured, and elevated (Gen 14:19):

Blessed be Abram of God Most High
 Creator of heaven and earth.
 And blessed be God Most High,
 Who has delivered your foes into your hand.

Some of the rituals in these narratives do not include a verbal component.²⁴ The absence of words simply means that the narrator’s description in that instance does not include verbal material. It does not mean that there *were* or *were not* verbal elements in the enactment itself. When one version of a ritual includes a verbal component that was not reported in other versions, the added component gains significance. Abraham builds two altars in Canaan in Gen 12. As with other rituals Abraham distinguishes his behavior from mundane activity, he acts in a culturally specific manner and his action distinguishes between the sacred and the profane and is an acknowledgment of the reality of power beyond human actions. When Abraham builds his first altar at Shechem there is no verbal component (Gen 12:7). When he builds an altar between Bethel and Ai the narrator states that Abraham “invoked the Lord by name.” In this case Abraham called to, or appealed to, God (Gen 12:8).²⁵

²⁴ The presence or absence of a verbal component does not appear to be related to the documentary sources. There are verbal components in rituals from each of the sources in these narratives. There has been scholarly discussion of whether P-source rituals in the priestly Temple were silent, as stated by Yehezkel Kaufmann in *The Religion of Israel*, 305. Kaufmann’s argument was refined by Israel Knohl, *JBL* 115/1 (1996): 17–30, who argues that the silence of the cult pertained only to what he calls the “inner” of three concentric circles: that of the priests who conducted the sacred service. The middle circle was comprised of the Levites and their songs, and the outer included the folk prayers of the people. Other elements of the priestly writings (Holiness school, for example) sought to combine elements of the priestly cult and folk ritual (21, n. 7). Knohl contends that the silence was grounded in the priestly understanding of the impersonal characteristics of the deity; Kaufmann says that the silence was an “intuitive expression of the priestly desire to fashion a non-pagan cult.” In these narratives the differences between rituals can be attributed to each source’s understanding of whether it was appropriate to incorporate laws and their rituals that were promulgated at Sinai into narratives whose context was historically before Sinai.

²⁵ The verb used in these examples is (*q.r.*’), which can mean “to call, to name,” here means “to invoke.” In ritual processes the verb can indicate the naming of something, as when Abraham names the site of the *Akedah* (Gen 22:14) and Jacob names Gilead and Bethel. When the same verb, *q.r.*’, is directed toward God, it performs the action of invoking, or calling upon, God.

Sometimes the narrator or a character adds a verbal component that explains what is occurring. When God makes a covenant with Abraham (Gen 15), in the end-section the narrator explains that God's promises are a "covenant" (*brit*). In another covenant narrative God explains that circumcision is described by God as "the sign of the covenant" (Gen 17) and in the end-section (Gen 17:21–27) God explains *how* the covenant will be maintained—through Isaac, who is not yet born. When Abraham makes a treaty with Abimelekh in Gen 21:22–34, Abimelekh asks him about the meaning of Abraham's action, and Abraham explains, "You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well" (Gen 21:29–30).²⁶

(d) *Elevation of a Mundane Act*. Among other things that ritual "does," it shows how a mundane activity, like eating, can be enhanced to indicate its specialness. David Wright identifies twenty ritual scenes or elements in the Ugaritic Aqhat narrative. He demonstrates how the ritualization process makes special, or "privileged," the mundane act of eating a meal.²⁷ "Privileged" eating, he explains, is set apart in various ways, such as by frequency, particular participants, seating arrangements, special clothing, an unusual amount of food, and a connection with other ritualized elements (such as prayers or sacrifice). A "privileged" process related to food is described in the "sacrifice that Jacob [alone] offers up (*wayyizbah ya'akob zebah*)" in Gen 31:54. Jacob is the privileged participant who makes the sacrifice; the offering is made "on the Height," away from Laban with whom he has concluded a pact. Jacob then shares the special meal with his own men and they spend the night there, away from others. The special circumstances surrounding this meal indicate that it is a privileged ritual.

Before I examine the Genesis rituals more closely, it is worth observing a ritual both as a process, as Bell discusses, and as a means to better understand the narrative in which it is placed. This approach has proven valuable for understanding narrative texts from the ancient Near East and Classical Greece and Rome.

²⁶ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 54.

²⁷ Wright, *Ritual in Narrative* 11–13.

6.3. *Literary Function of Ritual in Texts: Studies from the Ancient Near East and Classical Greece*

Studying ritual in its narrative context, David P. Wright explains, is conceptually different from the way that rituals have traditionally been studied:

In contrast to [traditional approaches of studying ritual]—which are *externally* oriented, that is, interested in how a text relates in one way or another to actual ritual practice that exists outside the story—*this approach looks at ritual within a story's context to see how it contributes to the development of the story*, advances the plot, forges major and minor climaxes, structures and periodicizes the story, and operates to enhance the portrayal of characters. As intimated above, the ritual motifs and scenes in these stories—and any story for that matter—are not simply selections from actual ritual texts or records of practice mechanically inserted into a text. *The scenes have been composed, apart from whatever relationship they have to actual practice, to serve the specific narrative context.* [Italics added.]²⁸

Wright's studies, and those of Deborah H. Roberts, hint at the wealth of material that can be discovered through analysis of the literary functions of rituals in narrative texts.²⁹

6.3.1. *Wright and Ritualized Feasts*

Wright demonstrates that the twenty ritualized feasts in the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat have structural and literary roles. The three initial feasts in the first part of the tale, which he describes as “felicitous,” establish a paradigm for the feasts that follow. They create expectations about how ritual should proceed, how agents should participate in it, and what its results might be. Later feasts have negative results, and the “contrast allows the upset to stand out in sharp contrast and thus to have significant dramatic effect.”³⁰ The three felicitous feasts are delimited by an “envelope” of blessing. The initial blessing was given to Dani'il from 'Il and mediated through Ba'al. Closing the envelope is the blessing that Dani'il gives to Aqhat. This structure, Wright says, “provides a structural delimitation for the series

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Deborah H. Roberts, “The Frustrated Mourner: Strategies of Closure in Greek Tragedy,” in *Nomodeiktes: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald*, ed. Ralph M. Rosen and Joseph Farrell, 573–589.

³⁰ Wright, *Ritual in Narrative* 19.

of felicitous rituals.”³¹ He concludes that the authors of Aqhat “employed ritual practices, patterns and motifs . . . in a creative way,” using literary contrasts, echoes, and patterns in the ritual narrations.³²

6.3.2. *Roberts and Culturally Constructed Burial Rituals*

For the classical world, Roberts demonstrates that life-cycle ritual practices of burial and mourning at the end of a text provide evidence of closural strategies by ancient Greek authors. Rituals associated with death are, in her words, “a kind of closural ritual par excellence.”³³ When the ancient Greek author replaced a natural closural event in the text, death, with a culturally constructed ritual, that is, a funeral or burial, the author used the platform of the ritual to provide insight about the situation or character. A funeral, in addition to marking the end of life for someone, “punctuates the lives of survivors, bringing different mourners together in a communal act and sets ‘socially constructed limits on the potentially unlimited, natural expression of grief.’” These rituals affect readers as they too may attempt to deal with the end of a life:

For the readers too, these rituals although they do not conceal residual tensions and terrible events to come or cancel differences between us, still give us, in Kermodé’s words, a sense of an ending.³⁴

In a similar way, an analysis of burial rituals at the ends of Genesis narratives demonstrates closural strategies of biblical writers. In Genesis the burial locations are specified and, in one example, the ritual makes explicit the relationship of the burial to other activities related to a death. The

³¹ Ibid., 97–98.

³² Ibid., 15–16.

³³ Roberts, “The Frustrated Mourner,” 574. She attributes the expression she uses later in this paragraph, “socially constructed limits on grief,” to Richard Seaford, “The Destruction of Limits in Sophokles’ *Elektra*,” in *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series 35, no. 2 (1985): 320.

A different strategy is posited by Francis M. Dunn for the ends of Euripides’ plays. In *Tragedy’s End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama*, 7–8, Dunn relates the use of “closing gestures” including closing etiologies, choral exit lines, and closing prophecy at the ends of the plays, but not the use of information related to themes and goals of the plays. He concludes that Euripides was not so interested in the hero’s end. Nevertheless, he used a formal rhetoric of closure, or “closing gestures.” Dunn contrasts Euripides with Herodotus, who considered that at the end (of a work or a person’s life), moral or didactic points must be made.

³⁴ Roberts, “The Frustrated Mourner,” 575.

three burials are all of women, Sarah (Gen 23:19),³⁵ Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (Gen 35:8), and Rachel (Gen 35:20). The burials of Sarah and Rachel conclude the lives of matriarchs who had important roles in many of the earlier narratives. Each of these is connected with a location in Canaan with which readers would be familiar. Sarah's gravesite in Hebron marks the first burial property owned by a patriarch in Canaan.³⁶ Later, Abraham and the other patriarchs are also buried there.³⁷ Deborah's burial at Allon-Bacuth is connected to the site where the narrative concludes, Bethel, but is otherwise unconnected to the story of Jacob's construction of an altar there. Yet it does record a death and that in itself is closural. Rachel's burial site is not identified with a specific location—it is merely “on the road to Ephrat”—yet the narrator indicates that the location would be easy to find. He says to his ancient readers that Jacob set up a “pillar” (מצבה) over her burial site and it can be still seen “to this day.” This is the only reference in the Bible to the use of a pillar to mark a gravesite.

The burial of Sarah provides a “socially constructed limit” to Abraham's mourning process. According to the narrative, Abraham had “mourned” her and “bewailed” her, remaining by her side after she died (23:1–3). Then he rises and engages with the local population to purchase land so that he can bury her in a site that he owns, which is difficult since he is not a native but a “resident alien.” The physical act of burying Sarah marks the end of the narrative and the end of Abraham's activities—mourning, purchasing land, the burial—that are related to her death. The burial is a marker of Abraham's ownership of the site “absolute and uncontest-

³⁵ The death of Sarah begins the narrative rather than concludes it. But, as will be noted later, that is not the destabilizing event in the narrative. Abraham's decision to purchase a burial site for her is the event that precipitates the narrative.

³⁶ As noted in Chap 2, n. 36, property used for burial may be a special kind of property with its own legal considerations, as indicated in the history of “various societies ancient and modern,” according to Delbert R. Hillers, in “Palmyrene Inscriptions and the Bible” in *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 11 (1989), 40–44. In Genesis, non-burial property is acquired by Jacob in Gen 33:19.

³⁷ Abraham dies in Gen 25:7–10, after living 175 years. He is buried by his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, “in the same cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, facing Mamre, the field that Abraham had bought from the Hittites,” where Sarah was buried.

able," valid into the future.³⁸ Together the three burials reflect culturally constructed ways of mourning, burial, marking burial locations, and legal ownership of burial land.

Other life-cycle rituals that appear at the ends of their narratives are also culturally constructed. These include circumcision (Gen 17), the blessing given by a character near death (Gen 27), and marriage (Gen 24). These rituals can continue to resonate with readers in part because of their familiarity with these types of activities. But even activities that are less familiar to readers, such as building altars or setting up a pillar to God, resonate because the rituals illuminate aspects of the characters' lives and situations, and also because readers note their inclusion by the writers and editors in these normally laconic texts.

6.4. *Rituals in this Study*

The rituals in the Genesis narratives are listed in the accompanying chart. Rituals that are not in end-sections are shown separately. In some of these narratives the end-section is relatively long compared to the rest of the narrative and may include an epilogue. All of the documentary sources in Genesis have rituals in them. One narrative, Gen 28:10–22, is a mixture of J- and E-sources, and the fact that this narrative also has a ritual in its end-section reflects a decision of the redactor/editor to end this narrative with a ritual.³⁹

³⁸ Also noted in Chap 2, n. 34 is the comment of Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis*, 160. "It is the act of burial that legally completes the transaction, that makes the sale absolute and incontestable, and that confers the power to dispose of the property by testament or will."

³⁹ Gen 28:10–22, which describes Jacob's first night and morning after he has departed for the east, is a mixture of J- and E-sources. The J verses are 10–11a, 13–16, and 19. They relate Jacob's departure from Beersheba, his staying the night "in a [specific] place," and then God standing over him with promises of descendants and protection. God promises that he will stay with Jacob until he brings him back to this land. Jacob awakes and names that place Bethel (House of God). The E verses, 11b–12, 17–18, and 20–22, contain the ritual and relate Jacob's taking a stone as his headrest, his dream, the ladder with angels, his waking, his setting up the stone as a pillar, pouring oil on it, and then making vows.

Genesis Narratives with Rituals in Their End-Sections

	Narrative	End-section ⁽¹⁾	Source ⁽²⁾ : ritual verses	Brief description
1.	Gen. 6–8:22	7:22–23; 8:2 <i>b</i> –3 <i>a</i> , 6, 8–12, 13 <i>b</i> , 20–22	J; 8:20–22	Flood story; Noah builds altar.
2.	Gen 12:1–9	5 <i>b</i> β –9	J; 12:7	Abraham arrives in Canaan; builds an altar.
	Gen 12:1–9	5 <i>b</i> β –9	J; 12:8	Abraham arrives in Canaan; builds a second altar.
3.	Gen 13:1–18	13:11	J; 13:18	Abraham and Lot separate; Abraham builds an altar.
4.	Gen 14:1–24	14:17–24	Not known; 14:18–20	Abraham rescues Lot; King Melchizedek blesses Abraham.
5.	Gen 15:1–21	15:4–21	J; 15:9–17	God's covenant with Abraham; Abraham cuts and arranges animals.
6.	Gen 17:1–27	17:23–27	P; 17:23–27	Covenant with Abraham; Abraham circumcises himself and his household.
7.	Gen 21:22–34 ⁽³⁾	21:27–34	E; 21:27–32	Treaty between Abraham and Abimelekh; rituals between them.
	Gen 21:22–34	21:27–34	E; 21:33	Abraham plants a tamarisk.
8.	Gen 22:1–19	22:9–19	E; J or RJE; 9–10	Binding of Isaac; near-sacrifice.
	Gen 22:1–19	22:9–19	J or RJE; 13	Binding of Isaac; sacrifice of the ram.
9.	Gen 23:1–20	23:16–20	P; 23:19	Abraham's purchase of land; burial of Sarah.
10.	Gen 24:1–67	24:50–67	J; 24:67	Abraham's servant finds a wife for Isaac; marriage.

Table (*cont.*)

	Narrative	End-section ⁽¹⁾	Source ⁽²⁾ ; ritual verses	Brief description
11.	Gen 26:12–33	26:27–32	J; 26:30–31	Incidents in life of Isaac; treaty and rituals with Abimelekh.
12.	Gen 27:1–45	27:27–45	J; 27:27–29	Isaac blesses Jacob.
13.	Gen 28:10–22	28:16–22	E; 28:18, 20–22	After Jacob's dream he sets up a pillar, pours oil on it, makes a vow.
14.	Gen 31:1–54	31:44–54	E; 31:45–53	Jacob flees Laban; treaty between Jacob and Laban.
	Gen 31:1–54	31:44–54	E; 31:54	Jacob offers a sacrifice on the mountain.
15.	Gen 32:4–33:20	33:3–20	E; 33:20	Jacob encounters Esau; Jacob sets up an altar at Shechem.
16.	Gen 35:1–8	35:7–8	E; 35:7	Jacob builds an altar at Bethel.
	Gen 35:1–8	35:7–8	E; 35:8	Deborah is buried.
17.	Gen 35:9–15 ⁽⁴⁾	35:11–15	E (or P); 35:14. Balance of narrative is P.	God renames Jacob Israel; Jacob raises a pillar.
18.	Gen 35:16–20	35:18–20	E; 35:20	Death of Rachel; Jacob sets up a pillar.

1. The “end-section,” as noted earlier, includes the transformation and additional information that the author/editor adds after that point.

2. The documentary source listed in the chart is that attributed to the ritual portion of the narrative.

3. For Gen 21:22–34, the Kafalenos paradigm suggests there is one prime and one subordinate destabilizing factor and both are resolved in the treaty process. (See note 40 and also the paradigm in Chapter 3, n. 59.)

4. Gen 35:9–15 is a minimal story; that is, it consists of three events, of which the first and third are *stative* and only the second is active. The events are conjoined chronologically. (See also Chapter 2, n. 26.) This narrative is P except for 35:14, which can be attributed to E.

Genesis Narratives Where the Ritual Is Not in the End-Section

19. Gen 4:1–16, (J; 4:3–5a), Cain and Abel; their offerings to God.
20. Gen 21:1–21 (primarily E; but Gen 21:1a, 2a, and 7 are J; Gen 21:1b, 2b–5 are P), circumcision of Isaac.
21. Gen 26:12–33, (J, 26:23–25a), Isaac builds altar.
22. Gen 27:46–28:9, (P 28:3–4), Jacob is blessed by Isaac.

6.5. *How Rituals Are Closural in Their Narratives*

6.5.1. *Closural Effects of Transformative Rituals*

Five of the rituals bring about the major or *key transformation* in their narrative. Three of these occur in the context of a treaty [see (a) below], and two others, Gen 22:1–19 and Gen 35:1–8, are not in treaty contexts [see (b) below].

(a) *Treaty Rituals that Are Transformative in Their Narratives.* Treaties and their rituals establish new equilibriums in these narratives:

Gen 21:22–34 (#7 in list of rituals)

Gen 26:12–33 (#11 in list of rituals)

Gen 31:1–32:3 (#14 in list of rituals)

These treaties are enacted between people who were in an antagonistic relationship before their agreements. The rituals within the treaties establish new equilibriums. In these stories the ritualized actions include the exchange of oaths and swearing to the stipulations of the treaty, a festive meal and drink, exchange of items of value (animals), physical markers as witnesses, and the parties' respective deities as witnesses to the agreement.

- Gen 21:22–34

In the first of the treaty narratives, Abimelekh, king of Gerar, arrives to visit Abraham at Beersheba with his chief of troops and states that he intends to establish a peaceful understanding with Abraham (21:22–23). Abraham also insists that he wants his claim to a well that he dug validated by Abimelekh (21:25). In the ritual activities that ensue, a new equilibrium is established as Abimelekh gets his treaty and Abraham gets his well.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The Kafalenos paradigm for Gen 21:22–34 is found in Chapter 3, n. 59. As noted there, I look at this narrative as an E-source document that has one prime and one subordinate destabilizing factor and they are resolved in the treaty process, verses 27–31.

• Gen 26:12–33

Abimelekh is the treaty partner again, this time with Isaac. Although this narrative is episodic and less tightly written than most, a narrative cause and effect shows that when Abimelekh and Isaac enact their treaty rituals the actions are transformative and they establish a new equilibrium.⁴¹

In the narrative the herdsmen of Gerar provide the destabilizing element in the story by repeatedly disrupting Isaac's ability to get water from wells; that causes Isaac to move from place to place and to dig new wells each time. When Abimelekh, his councilor, and his chief of troops come to visit, Isaac and Abimelekh swear a treaty promising not to harm one

⁴¹ Although the structure of Chapter 26 has been referred to as “various incidents in the life” of Isaac (Sarna, *JPS Tanakh, Genesis*, 183), the Kafalenos paradigm for verses 12–33 suggests that it is a complete narrative. Note that causal steps D and E (testing of Isaac) are repeated.

Kafalenos Paradigm for Gen 26:12–33, Wells of Isaac and Treaty with Abimelekh

	Function	Steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Isaac is successful in the Philistine lands, 12–14.
A	<i>Destabilizing event</i>	The Philistines become jealous and Abimelekh sends him away, 14–16.
C ¹	<i>C-actants initial act to alleviate A</i>	Isaac departs, settles in Wadi of Gerar, digs wells so he can survive there, 17–19.
D-1	<i>C-actant is tested</i>	Herdsmen of Gerar quarrel with Isaac's herdsmen over the well (“Esek”), 20.
E-1	<i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Isaac's herdsmen dig another well (“Sitnah”), 21.
	D-2 <i>C-actant is tested</i>	Herdsmen of Gerar dispute this well, 21.
	E-2 <i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Isaac moves from there, and there is no further quarrel; he names the well (“Rehoboth”), 22.
F	<i>C-actant acquires empowerment</i>	God appears to Isaac in Beersheba, where he has moved; he builds an altar there, 23–25.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a</i>	Isaac makes a non-aggression pact with Abimelekh, Ahuzzath, and Phicol, who have come from Gerar, 27–30.
I	<i>Success (or failure) of H</i>	The Philistine king departs in peace, 31.
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	Isaac has peace and water as his servants succeed with a new well, which he names “Shibah,” 32.

another, and they feast and drink. Then the Philistines depart in peace. The new equilibrium that is established by the treaty rituals is further stabilized when the narrator reports that Isaac's servants have found water in a new well.

- Gen 31

The third treaty with its rituals that provides the key transformation for its narrative is between Jacob and Laban, his father-in-law (Gen 31:1–32:3). At the beginning of this narrative Jacob has been living in Laban's household in the east for twenty years and he now feels threatened (31:1):

Now he [Jacob] heard the things that Laban's sons were saying: "Jacob has taken all that was our father's..." Jacob also saw that Laban's manner toward him was not as it had been in the past.

God tells Jacob to return to his homeland, and Jacob's wives agree to come with him. Jacob departs secretly with his family and all his possessions, but after a few days an angry Laban overtakes him. However, Laban has been warned by God, and the two men establish a treaty between them. Each agrees not to travel beyond a designated location (named Gal'ed and also Mizpeh and Yegar-Sahadutha) with hostile intent. The treaty resolves the threat that Jacob felt from Laban and his sons and it offers what Laban had requested—protection for his daughters.

(b) *Other Rituals that Are Transformative in Their Narratives.* Gen 22:1–19 and Gen 35:1–8 (#8 and #16 in list of rituals) are transformative and do not involve treaties.

- Gen 22:1–19

There are two ritual actions in the *Akedah* and the first of these is transformative: the sacrifice of Isaac, which is called off, saving him and assuring Abraham's posterity. In the second ritual Abraham sacrifices a ram in place of his son.⁴² There are, however, complicating factors in this story, which are presented here. How these factors work *against* closure are discussed in Chapter 7.

In the story, God's command to Abraham and the impending death of Isaac are the destabilizing factors. Abraham obeys God and leaves with

⁴² Two additional closural forms—an etiology and a saying or proverb—immediately follow the sacrifice of the ram, suggesting that at some time in its textual history the narrative could have ended at this point.

his son (and servants who travel part of the way with them) to sacrifice Isaac at a designated but unnamed place. The transformative ritual is in verses 9–10: father and son arrive at the place for the sacrifice; Abraham builds an altar, lays out the wood on the altar, binds his son on it, and picks up the knife to slay him. Because of these actions an angel of God calls out to him to prevent the death of Isaac. “For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me,” the angel says (22:11–12). The events that follow—the second ritual (22:13), God’s renewal of his promises to Abraham (22:15–18), and Abraham’s return to Beersheba (22:19)—do not change the new equilibrium in the story. Thus the story ends.

When the sequence of actions in this narrative is plotted following the causal steps of the Kafalenos paradigm, the structure in the *Akedah* reveals an anomaly.⁴³ There are two C-actants, that is, there are two protagonists whose primary action alleviates the initial destabilizing action. The first C-actant is Abraham. He demonstrates his obedience to God and God’s destabilizing request by picking up the knife over his bound son, indicating that he is about to perform the sacrifice. That is his “primary action to alleviate the destabilizing action.” With Abraham as

⁴³ Kafalenos Paradigm for Gen 22:1–19, the *Akedah*

	Function	Causal steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Abraham has a son, Isaac, whom he loves.
A	<i>Destabilizing event</i>	God demands that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac, 1–2.
C ⁱ	<i>C-actant's initial act</i>	Abraham sets out with his son to the place that God designates, 3.
D	<i>C-actant is tested</i>	Isaac questions his father, asking where the sacrifice is, 7.
E	<i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Abraham responds that God will take care of that, 8.
G	<i>C-actant arrives at place for H</i>	Abraham and Isaac arrive at the place, 9.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A</i>	Abraham appears ready to sacrifice his son; the knife is in his hand, 9–10.
H	<i>C-actant #2—primary action to alleviate A</i>	An angel of God calls to Abraham and tells him not to harm the boy because God now knows that Abraham fears God, 11–12.
I	<i>Success of H</i>	A ram is sacrificed in place of Isaac, 13; the angel of God states that God’s blessings will be bestowed upon Abraham, 15–18.
EQ		Abraham returns to his ‘normal’ life, 19.

the C-actant, the ritual is the transformative activity in the narrative, verses 9–10. But there is a second C-actant as well. In verse 11, the angel of God calls out to Abraham; his action averts Isaac's death. Looking at the structure of the narrative in this way, the transformative action occurs when the angel of God speaks.

The anomaly of two C-actants in this narrative may be a result of the author simply choosing to write his narrative in this way; or it may be a result of the composite nature of the narrative.⁴⁴ For unrelated reasons scholars have suggested that the *Akedah* is a composite text. One reason is that the name of God in the story is *Elohim* in verses 1–10, whereas the name *YHWH* is used in the verses in which Isaac's death is prevented, verses 11–15, and also in verse 16.⁴⁵ Moreover, verses 11–15 are linguistically framed as a unit with the words, "An angel of the Lord called to him from heaven," with the exception that the second iteration includes the word[s] "a second time" (*šenit*). It is in those verses as well that the second C-actant, the "angel of the Lord," appears to prevent the sacrifice of the child.

If these anomalies lead to a suspicion that verses 11–15 are a unit that was added to an earlier version of this narrative, then it becomes possible that in the original E-source version Abraham actually sacrificed his son.⁴⁶ There is some evidence later in the narrative to support that

⁴⁴ It should be repeated here that the Kafalenos paradigm provides a grid and a guide to analyze texts. The stories do not "have" to fit.

⁴⁵ Generally, *Elohim* is the name for God used in E- and P- sources; *YHWH* is the name for God used in J-sources.

⁴⁶ Most scholars accept that there are likely two sources in this narrative, although there are disagreements regarding specific verses. Friedman, who is generally followed in this study, understands that Gen 22:1–10 and 16–19 are from the E-source and verses 11–15 are RJE (redactor of J and E). RJE added the name *YHWH* in verse 16 so that it continues to appear that the angel is speaking to Abraham. Baden, in *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*, 243–247, argues that the narrative is essentially all E with the possible late addition of J's blessing language (vv. 15–18), although E itself would have its own version of the blessings. Baden makes the case against a JE documentary layer to the Pentateuch and contends instead that at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, a redactor brought together the four independent strands or traditions, J, E, P, and D (310–311). On that basis he argues that the Pentateuch redactor (or someone later than that) added the J promises into the E setting of the *Akedah*. David M. Carr, in *Reading the Fractures in Genesis*, 157–159, who tends to read the text as either P or non-P, suggests that some non-P texts were secondarily modified in order to conform to P modes (57–58). For verses 15–18 of this narrative he discerns the presence of Deuteronomistic elements. Speiser, *Genesis*, 166, attributes all verses except 14–16 to E but notes that the overall style of the narrative is more typical of J and therefore that J was "either appended to E, or E was superimposed upon J." Speiser's

supposition. For example, once Abraham has picked up his knife (22:10), Isaac is never mentioned again, although Abraham's return from the mountain would likely refer to him as it does to the servants.⁴⁷ Also, the promise of blessings to Abraham in verse 17 is introduced by these words, "Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son" (22:17). The text does not state what "not withholding" actually entails. It could be that this refers to Abraham taking the knife in his hand, or perhaps to an actual sacrifice of Isaac, if that occurred in an original E-source version. These complexities in the text may be at the root of the anomaly of two C-actants in one narrative. There is no question, however, that in subsequent Genesis stories Isaac is alive. He marries Rebekah and fathers Jacob and Esau.

The inconsistencies outlined above complicate one's understanding of the transformation that occurs within the context of the ritual. It is not clear whether it is brought about by Abraham's action or by the angel of God.

- Gen 35:1–8

The E-source story of the altar that Jacob builds at Bethel concludes with the ritual that transforms the narrative. Just a few words are related. The narrator says, "and he built an altar there."⁴⁸ But this resolves God's destabilizing directive at the beginning of the narrative: When Jacob was returning to Canaan from the east with his family, God told him to return to Bethel and build an altar there to God, who had appeared to him when he ran away from Esau twenty years earlier (35:1). At that earlier time Jacob had tricked his father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing instead

concluding comment is perhaps most telling. He says that another hand may be involved as well, and "the issue is not a closed one by any means."

⁴⁷ When Abraham bids the servants to remain at a location as he continues onward with his son, he tells them, "The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you" (22:5). As the narrative ends, however, the reader is told, "Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beersheba; and Abraham stayed in Beersheba" (22:19).

⁴⁸ This narrative is from the E-source. There is a question regarding the last verse, 35:8, which appears to be appended to the primary story. That otherwise unrelated verse, which states that Rebekah's nurse Deborah died at Bethel at Allon-Bacuth, may have been attached by a redactor because of its connection to Bethel. The verse is unrelated to the rest of the narrative but its theme, death and burial, is a clausal element.

of Esau (Gen 28:10–22).⁴⁹ At that point Jacob fled to the east, to Laban’s household. But on his first night in the wilderness God appeared to him and promised to be with him, to protect him, and to bring him back to his land. Now, twenty years later in Gen 35, God tells Jacob to return there and build an altar. Jacob obeys; he prepares himself and his household and they travel to Bethel. There Jacob builds the altar and re-establishes the equilibrium between himself and God.

6.5.2. *Closural Effects of Non-Transformational Rituals*

Most of the rituals in these Genesis narratives occur *after* the key transformation, in the end-sections of their narratives. They bring about some change because they are *processes*, but they also are closural in specific ways. They may add finality or stability to the new equilibrium; they may add integrity by supporting the values and characterizations established. They may also reinforce themes found in other patriarchal stories or support ideas that are verbalized in other books of the Bible. These non-transformational rituals do not change the final equilibrium but are nonetheless closural. I discuss five of these rituals, which are found, respectively, in Genesis 13, 15, 17, 23, and 24.

⁴⁹ Kafalenos Paradigm for Gen 35:1–8, Jacob at Bethel

	Function	Steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Jacob is in Shechem.
A	<i>Destabilizing event</i>	Jacob is told by God to go up to Bethel and build an altar to the God (<i>El</i>) who appeared to him when he was fleeing from Esau, 1.
C	<i>Decision by C-actant to alleviate A.</i>	Jacob tells his people to prepare themselves so that he can go to Bethel and build an altar there, 2–3.
F	<i>C-actant acquires empowerment</i>	Jacob and his people are safe as they move about because a “terror” from God falls on the local people and they do not pursue them, 5.
G	<i>C-actant arrives at place</i>	Jacob comes to Luz/Bethel, 6.
H	<i>C-actant’s primary action to alleviate A</i>	Jacob builds an altar there, 7.
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Jacob re-stabilizes his relationship with God by building an altar at Bethel, 7.

Epilogue: The death of Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, is reported near Bethel in verse 8.

- Gen 13

In Gen 13, the ritual described with the words “and he built an altar there” is not transformative, unlike what occurs in Gen 35, although both examples add stability to the new equilibrium. In Gen 13, Abraham and Lot agree that their families are too numerous for them to remain in the same region. The transformation occurs when Lot moves to the vicinity of Sodom and Abraham remains in Canaan; that is the new stasis. In an epilogue to this story (Gen 13:14–18) God appears to Abraham and repeats his earlier promises to him and adds, “Raise your eyes and look out from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west, for I give all the land that you see (*r.ʿh*) to you and your offspring forever . . . *Up, walk about the land*, through its length and its breadth, for I give it to you” (13:14–17). Abraham obeys, and (Gen 13:18),

Abram moved his tent, and came to dwell (*y.š.b*) at the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron; and he built an altar there to the Lord.

The ritual is closural in a number of ways. First, building an altar is connected with Abraham stopping his travels, at least for a while. The verb he “dwelled” or “stayed” (*y.š.b*) is commonly found as a formulaic verb for ending narratives.⁵⁰ Thus the activity of this part of the narrative is expressly over. In addition, God’s admonition to see the land supports themes expressed in later books of the Bible by contributing to Israel’s legal claim to the land of Canaan.⁵¹ The narrator specifies the geographic location of the altar. Moreover, God’s appearance to Abraham and Abraham’s response of seeing more of the land and then building another altar clarifies the idea that God’s promise will be only to Abraham and his family and not to his extended family.

⁵⁰ See the chart *y.š.b*—*š.w.b* in Section 4.5.3.

⁵¹ In Deuteronomy and Joshua the idea of walking the land is associated with God’s gift of Canaan to Israel. Deut 11:24, “Every spot on which your food treads will be yours . . .” and similarly, Josh 1:3. See Sarna, *Genesis*, 99–100 and 100, n. 12, and Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 115 and 364, n. 43. In addition, Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright, *Joshua*, The Anchor Bible, 534, commenting on Josh 24:3, point out that Israel is told to travel the land not as a pastoral nomad who seasonally moves about, but rather to establish a “network of effective control.” Joshua, speaking before all of Israel, quotes God as saying, “I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and *led him* through the whole land of Canaan . . .”

- Gen 15

The ritualized action in Gen 15:1–21 occurs in the long end-section after Abraham has learned from God that he will indeed have a child of his own and that he will have many, many heirs (15:5).⁵² In verse 6 the narrator asserts the success of the transformation: Abraham “put his trust in the Lord.” Then the promises are detailed in two scenes in the end-section; a portion of the ritual appears in each scene.⁵³ In the first, in which God verifies that the land will be Abraham’s possession, Abraham brings animals as offerings and cuts them in half as God has directed him to do (15:7–11). In the second scene at sunset, in which God details the future history of Abraham’s offspring, there appeared “a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between those pieces.”⁵⁴ The ritual confirms God’s promise to Abraham.

- Gen 17

The ritual of circumcision occurs after the transformation in Gen 17.⁵⁵ Earlier in the narrative God appears to Abraham and establishes the covenant with him and his offspring. The sign of the covenant will be the circumcision. In the transformation, God tells Abraham that the covenant will be maintained through Isaac, whom Sarah will bear in the following year (Gen 17:20–21). In the epilogue, Abraham enacts the ritual process of circumcision on himself and his household, thus fulfilling his only explicit obligation under the covenant. His actions stabilize the new equilibrium.

⁵² The Kafalenos paradigm for Gen 15:1–21 is found in Chapter 4, n. 30. The paradigm shows that the new equilibrium is established in verse 5 and that the balance of the narrative confirms it. This narrative also fits into the category of “minimal stories” noted in Chapter 2, n. 23.

⁵³ In Gen 15, verse 5 indicates that the scene is at night; verses 12 and 17 indicate that the second part of the narrative takes place at sundown.

⁵⁴ Although most of this narrative is attributed to the J-source (with the exception of the promises in verses 13–16 or 17aα), questions about its structure have been raised in rabbinic and modern scholarship. In modern scholarship, Friedman attributes this narrative to the J-source with interpolations of RJE at verse 7, “Ur of the Chaldees,” and verses 13–17aα, where it is stated that Abraham’s descendants will not return to Canaan until the fourth generation. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, 58, views the covenant of the land as an earlier stratum in this narrative.

An issue raised in rabbinic scholarship, that is, whether the narrative has one or two parts, is outlined in Sarna, *Genesis*, 111. The narrative should be understood either as presenting a single divine promise or as having two parts, one relating to the promise of Abraham’s posterity and the other to the gift of the land.

⁵⁵ A Kafalenos paradigm for Gen 17 is in Chapter 3, n. 27.

- Gen 23

When Abraham purchases a burial site for Sarah, the life-cycle ritual of burial occurs in the legalistic end-section that follows the events of the narrative (Gen 22:17–20). The burial is *after* the key transformation in which the ownership of the land is transferred from Ephron the Hittite to Abraham (22:16). The burial re-affirms the finality and stability of the transformation of the burial site to Abraham.

- Gen 24

The rituals associated with the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah (in verse 67 of Gen 24:1–67) add finality to the acquisition of a bride for Isaac. The actions are briefly described and occur after the transformation in the narrative. Abraham's servant has already obeyed Abraham's request to find a wife for Isaac, Rebekah has been legally been given over to the servant by her family in the east, and the servant has brought her back to Canaan to become Isaac's wife. The ritual begins in a last scene with specialized action and location. Rebekah, as she is traveling into the region where Isaac is settled, asks the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" When the servant tells her that the man she sees is her intended husband, she "took her veil and covered herself." The servant then tells Isaac of all the things that occurred in the east as he found Rebekah for him. The next part of the ritual occurs as Isaac leads Rebekah to his mother's tent, a place that holds special meaning for him, and he marries her:

Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death. (24:67)

The marriage ritual adds a finalizing stability to the new equilibrium. Isaac now has a wife with whom he can continue Abraham's legacy.

6.5.3. *Closural Effects When Rituals Establish Hierarchies*

(a) *International Hierarchies*. Rituals can help create or express the power relationships between people and institutions, as Catherine Bell and others have demonstrated.⁵⁶ The establishment of hierarchy is a stabilizing

⁵⁶ Saul M. Olyan demonstrates the relationship between ritual and hierarchy in *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult*. See Section 6.2.3b. Bell's own

factor in society; it provides the same stabilizing force in a narrative. When a hierarchy is noted or established in a ritual in the end-section of a narrative, it contributes to stability as the story ends. Early in this chapter I discussed the international hierarchy established in the ritual between Abraham and Melchizedek (Gen 14). The patriarchs' relationships with Abimelekh, the king of Gerar, is also significant. Abimelekh travels with his entourage *to* Abraham and *to* Isaac to make treaties (Gen 21 and 26).

(b) *Patriarchs and the Prerogatives of Monarchy*. Another way that hierarchy is expressed in these rituals is through building an altar or raising a pillar. Only certain individuals do this in Genesis—Noah and the patriarchs. In Gen 13, after Abraham and Lot separate, Abraham builds an altar to God. Lot, who has gone to live in Sodom, does not build an altar. Jacob is unique among the patriarch in that he also erects pillars, four times in the stories. Twice he raises a pillar in a ritual between himself and God (Gen 28:18; 35:7); a third time he raises a pillar in the treaty with Laban (31:45, and Laban also erects a pillar); and a fourth time he marks Rachel's grave with a pillar (35:20).

Although the Genesis narratives do not explicitly claim nobility for the patriarchs, the descriptions of them meeting with kings and constructing altars and erecting pillars may indicate that the narrators were attributing to the patriarchs prerogatives normally given to a king. In the ancient Near East, kings assumed the responsibility for constructing altars and erecting monoliths.⁵⁷

A ritual that establishes the relative importance of a patriarch is also satisfying to readers who look back to these individuals as their forefathers. If readers perceive them in that way, establishment of the hierarchy accomplishes two things: it provides stability to the overall narrative and

discussion of this role of rituals can be found in *Ritual Theory*, 69–73. Wright observes its importance in “The Study of Ritual,” 134.

⁵⁷ Holly Pittman, “The White Obelisk and the Problem of Historical Narrative in the Art of Assyria,” *The Art Bulletin*, v 78, 2 (Jun. 1996), 353, states that in the ancient Near East, “upright stones were the prerogative of power.” Dan Ben-Amos first directed me to this essay. Regarding altars, the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, I, 162, notes that throughout the period of the Israelite monarchy, “it was the king who was held accountable for the construction and maintenance of altars and related structures. . . . It is uncertain if altars were built by private persons.” In Num 23, Balaam builds an altar, but he is acting on the authority of a royal patron. In the pre-monarchic history in the Book of Judges, in Judg 17, an individual named Micah had a “house of God” (17:5) and he invited a young man, a Levite, to remain there as his priest, 12.

it contributes to readers' satisfaction as the narratives end and they view the relative importance of the patriarchs.

6.5.4. *Closural Effects When the Divine Is Invoked in a Ritual*

God is ubiquitous in the Genesis narratives, creating the world (Gen 1 and 2–3), establishing rules for mankind to live by (Gen 8, 9, 17), and getting personally involved in people's lives (Gen 12:1–9 and 12:10–20, for example). When God is invoked in rituals that are in the end-sections of these narratives, the invocation of God adds a stable and final force to the new equilibrium. A character who *invokes* God, whether in a ritual with other people or in a ritual directed to God, is acting on the assumption that there is a power greater than himself or any other human being. His action presumes a relationship between himself and the divine and indicates that he expects that God is benevolent, loyal, and fair; he perceives that the participation of the divine will help him. This creates stability at the end of a narrative and contributes to closure.

- Gen 21 and Gen 26

The two treaties involving King Abimelekh that were discussed above demonstrate the sense of stability that God's involvement brings in an end-section treaty ritual. In the first narrative, Abimelekh observes that God has had an active role on behalf of Abraham, and he assumes that God's activity and power will continue. That is the reason he comes to Abraham in Beersheba to make a treaty (Gen 21:22–34). "God is with you [Abraham] in everything that you do," he says (21:22). Abimelekh asks of Abraham, "swear to me here by God" (21:23). In the end-section of that narrative (21:27–34), "the two of them swore an oath." Although the word God is not mentioned at that point, oaths are declarations invoking God (or other deities) and function as witnesses to the truth of the participants' statements in the treaty. Abimelekh's initial statements in verse 22 make it clear that it is God who is invoked because, based on God's prior actions, he has the ability to enforce the terms of the agreement. This stabilizes the end of the narrative.

In the second treaty narrative Abimelekh has harassed Isaac for a long period of time during which Isaac moved about in Gerar and then went to Beersheba (Gen 26:12–33). At that point Abimelekh and his men say to Isaac, "We now see plainly that the Lord has been with you, and we thought: Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties, between you and us" (26:28). After that statement the two sides

perform ritual actions involved in making a treaty: they establish the stipulations of the pact (29), Isaac prepares a feast, and they eat and drink (30).⁵⁸ As in the first Abimelekh treaty, they exchange oaths (31). The oaths to God provide a sense that the new equilibrium will be stable, and this brings stability to the end of the narrative itself.

- Gen 31

The treaty between Jacob and Laban invokes their deities, God and Laban's god of Nahor. When Laban overtakes the fleeing Jacob he says, "May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor—their ancestral deities—'judge between us'" (31:53). The presence of the second deity indicates that the writer respects the need of each of the participants to invoke his own deity. God's involvement may be important to Jacob (and to readers); the involvement of the god of Nahor is key to Laban's perception of ongoing stability after the treaty is drawn.

On the one hand, the description of God's and other deities' involvement in these treaties reflects a covenant tradition found throughout the ancient Near East. Covenants between nations regularly incorporated a section with divine blessings and curses in order to ensure adherence to their stipulations.⁵⁹ On the other hand, from the point of view of the structure of a narrative, the presence of the divine in a ritual in the end-section contributes to closure by affirming finality and stability for the new equilibrium that has been established.

Rituals that an individual initiates with God and that do not include any other people demonstrate a similar perception of stability and closural force for the character and for the narrative. When Noah builds an altar at the end of the J-source Flood story, God's response carries a personal assurance for him that he will not again destroy the earth (Gen 8:20–22); Noah's assurance affects readers, who gain confidence that the destructive flood will not recur. The altars that Abraham builds in Gen 12 and 13 and the tamarisk that he plants in Gen 21 reflect his acknowledgment of God's

⁵⁸ As discussed earlier in conjunction with Wright's study of ritualized feasts in Aqhat and with the biblical Jacob's sacrifice that he shares with his men alone atop the Height (Gen 31:54), the mundane process of eating can become a ritual when it is set apart by frequency, location, or particular participants, or is connected with other ritualized elements; see above, Section 6.2.3*d*. In this example, Gen 26:12–33, the "other" ritualized elements are the stipulations of the pact and the oaths.

⁵⁹ See for example, Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*. 2nd Edition, 1981.

role in his life, but also reflect the narrator's choice to bring this sense of assurance to the end of these stories.

6.5.5. *Closural Effects of the Ritual Discourse: Specific Language and Other Markers*

The discourse, that is, *how* the ritual is presented, contributes significantly to its closural power, especially when readers recognize the recurrence of certain forms at the ends of narratives. The forms can incorporate specific or formulaic language that indicates a ritual process; they can refer to physical markers and to known places or traditions related to the ritual.⁶⁰ These send a signal to readers that a ritual is in progress.

Specific language marks the ritualized construction of an "altar" (*mizbeaḥ*), a "pillar" (*maššebah*), or a "tamarisk" (*'ešel*) nearly a dozen times. For building an altar, the most common expression is, "and he built there an altar (*wayibben šam mizbeaḥ*) to the Lord."⁶¹ The expression has three parts. The first, the verbal component, is always imperfect *waw*-consecutive masculine singular: "he built" (*b.n.h*). The verb is followed by the adverb: "there" (*šam*). A direct object follows: "an altar" (*mizbeaḥ*).

There are of course variations of this formula and additions to it. Sometimes the narrator adds that the altar was built "to the Lord," as when Abraham builds altars at Shechem and at Bethel (Gen 12:7, 8). Sometimes the narrator states that God is "invoked" (*q.r.*), as when Abraham "invoked the Lord by name" (Gen 12:8). When Abraham plants a tamarisk at Beersheba, the same sentence structure is used but instead of the generic adverb "there," Beersheba is specifically named within the formula (Gen 21:33). The narrator also adds the name of God that Abraham invoked. "[Abraham] planted a tamarisk at Beersheba and invoked there the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God."⁶² When Jacob builds an altar at Shechem, the same sentence structure is used again but with a different verb, "to erect" (*n.š.b*) (Gen 33:20).⁶³

⁶⁰ The closural effect of mentioning geographical names is discussed in Chapter 5.

⁶¹ This formula is found in Gen 8:20 (Noah), and Gen 12:7, 8, and 13:18 (Abraham). The Noah instance does not include the reference to a place, that is, the word "there" is missing, but it does include a reference to Noah's "burnt offerings" (*'olot*). In 26:25 (Isaac), the expression is not in the end-section; that example specifies that Isaac invoked God by name: "He built an altar there and invoked the Lord by name." Jacob also builds an altar using a portion of the expression, plus a naming formula, in 35:7: "He built an altar there and named the site El-Bethel."

⁶² In Gen 21:33, the verb is "to plant" (*n.t.*) and the object is a "tamarisk" (*'ešel*).

⁶³ In Gen 33:20, Jacob also names the altar, "El the God of Israel (*El Elohei Yisrael*)" In 35:1-8, the verb "to do, make" (*'s.h*) is used prior to the ritual, in verses 1 and 3.

In addition to formulaic language, the ritualized actions often refer to names of places, physical markers, and traditions that readers may be aware of. This information halts the forward movement of the narrative; it re-directs the readers' focus from the time or place of the narrative to a time closer to their own and to a location they may know.⁶⁴ Bethel, Beersheba, Hebron, Shechem, and Gilead are identified as places where rituals occurred, and sometimes numerous rituals occurred in those places.⁶⁵ When stone pillars are erected in a named place, the mention of the pillar can alert readers to look for physical evidence of the ritual even years after it occurred.⁶⁶ That is what the narrator of Gen 35:16–20 told his ancient readers. After he reported that Jacob set up a pillar on the road to Ephrath he added, "It is the pillar at Rachel's grave *to this day*." Jacob also erects pillars at Bethel (twice) and at Gilead.⁶⁷

A tradition that is mentioned or established in a ritual process can also draw the reader away from the time of the narrative. If readers are aware of the tradition that is mentioned, the ritual connects to events in their own lives or in their knowledge of traditions. The concept of a tithe to God is introduced by Abraham in his ritual meal with King Melchizedek (Gen 14:20) and by Jacob at Bethel (28:22). The blessing of children is

⁶⁴ In Chapter 5 I identified and discussed the etiologies that sometimes incorporate these markers, and the contributions of Johannes Fichtner, Burke O. Long, Friedemann W. Golka, Brevard Childs, and Dan Ben-Amos to an understanding of their varied roles in narratives.

⁶⁵ Bethel (Gen 28:18, 35:7; 35:15); Beersheba (Gen 21:33); Hebron (Gen 23:19); Shechem (Gen 12:6–7); and Gilead (Gen 31:47); Bethlehem/Ephrat (Gen 35:19).

⁶⁶ Carl F. Graesser, "Standing Stones in Ancient Palestine," 34, points out that the etymological origin of "pillar (*maššebah*)," is related to the basic meaning of the root *n.š.b*, which is "standing" or "to take one's stand." Graesser suggests that the purpose of a pillar would be to "arrest the attention of the onlooker because it stood in a position it would not naturally [maintain] from gravity alone; only purposeful human activity could accomplish such 'setting up.'" He reviews the functions of a physical *maššebah* (37). It could serve as a memorial for a person who has died, mark a legal relationship between two or more individuals, commemorate an event, or mark a sacred area where the deity might be found, where the deity is cultically immanent, or where worship would reach the deity. He adds that a single stone could serve several functions at one time. A *maššebah* could have functions transferred to it once it had been established.

⁶⁷ Another physical marker that is constructed or, more accurately, "raised" within rituals is the pillar. A similar linguistic structure is used for raising pillars but three different, appropriate, verbs are used; in each instance it is Jacob who erects the pillar. Twice the verb used is *n.š.b*. In Gen 35:20, Jacob erects a stone pillar to mark Rachel's grave; in Gen 35:14 he raises a pillar in the place God had spoken to him. In the description of the first pillar that he raises, in Gen 28:18 at Bethel, the verb is *בָּנָה*. And, the verb *קָם* is used for the pillar to God that also marks the boundaries between Jacob and Laban in Gen 31:45.

enacted by Isaac in 27:23–29, and in the Joseph novella by Jacob for Joseph's sons.⁶⁸ An erect stone pillar is set up over Rachel's burial site of (Gen 35:20).

6.6. *Rituals That Are Not at the End of Their Narratives*

A look at rituals that are not at the ends of their narratives may provide some insight into the strategy that biblical writers used when they did place a ritual in the end-section of the narrative. These rituals are not in end-sections:

- Gen 4:3–5a, in Gen 4:1–16, J-source, Cain and Abel's offerings to God.
- Gen 21:4, in Gen 21:1–21, circumcision of Isaac by Abraham. This circumcision occurs in the P-source introductory verses (1b, 2b–5) of a narrative that is primarily E-source; in addition, verse 7 is attributed to J.
- Gen 26:23–25a, in Gen 26:1–33, J-source, Isaac's construction of an altar; it occurs among various episodes about Isaac.
- Gen 28:3–4 in Gen 27:46–28:9, P-source, Jacob is blessed before he departs for the east.

The activities in this group of rituals are intrinsically no different from the others discussed earlier. They are processes in which an individual does something special and out of the ordinary that is appropriate and effective in his culture. An individual makes offerings to God (Cain and Abel, 4:3–5a), or he enacts a circumcision (21:4), or builds an altar to God (Isaac in 26:23–25a), or blesses a child (28:3–4). The key difference seems to be that these rituals are not closural forms in their stories but rather have other narrative functions.

- Gen 4

Abel and Cain each bring an offering to God in Gen 4:3–4. Their activity is special, different from their normal mundane activities, and acceptable in their culture. Yet, their offerings do not bring stasis to an unstable situation; instead, in this narrative the ritual contributes to the destabilization of the equilibrium and helps set the events of the story in motion.

⁶⁸ In the Joseph novella, near the end, Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, Gen 48:9, 15, 20. *b.r.k* can also indicate a simple greeting or bidding of farewell.

• Gen 21

Abraham's circumcision of Isaac in 21:4 within the narrative of Gen 21:1–21 is a ritual that does not have a causal function in the plot.⁶⁹ The causal functions, as noted earlier, are those steps that are undertaken in response to an initial destabilizing action; each subsequent step is a motivated action; and the actions are completed when stasis has been restored, that is, when there is a new equilibrium.⁷⁰ In Gen 21, the first verses note that Isaac has been born and is circumcised on his eighth day. From a structural standpoint, that information is part of the initial equilibrium, as is the mention of the feast that Abraham makes for him on the day he is weaned (Gen 21:8). The plot with its causal functions follows that initial equilibrium. It revolves around Sarah's desire to expel Ishmael and his mother, Hagar. Sarah asks Abraham to cast Ishmael out and God tells Abraham to accede to Sarah's request. The destabilizing action in the narrative occurs when Abraham sends them away (21:15). The primary action to *alleviate*

⁶⁹ Kafalenos Paradigm for Gen 21:1–21, Hagar and Ishmael

	Function	Steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Abraham has a son, Isaac, who is circumcised, and also another son, Ishmael, son of Hagar (who is also circumcised), 1–8.
A (or a)	<i>Destabilizing event, or re-evaluation that reveals instability</i>	Abraham casts out his son Ishmael and Hagar, 15.
C	<i>Decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A or a</i>	God hears the cry of Ishmael as he is dying under a bush in the wilderness of Beersheba, 17.
C'	<i>C-actant's initial act to alleviate A or a</i>	God sends an angel to Hagar, 17. The angel says God has heeded the boy and he will make a great nation of him, 18.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a</i>	God opens Hagar's eyes so she can see a well, and give the boy water so he will survive, 19.
I, or I (neg)	<i>Success (or failure) of H</i>	God will be with the boy as he grows and is successful, living in wilderness as a bowman, 20–21.
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	Ishmael survives, but he will live apart.

⁷⁰ The Kafalenos paradigm identifies a series of causal steps within a starting and an ending equilibrium.

that destabilizing act occurs when, in the wilderness, God opens Hagar's eyes so that she can see a well and she gives the boy water to drink so he will survive (21:19). After this transformation, additional information is related: the reader learns that Ishmael will survive and become a nation and that he will live apart from the patriarchal family in the future.

This narrative reflects a conflation of three documentary sources and that may contribute to nuanced understandings of the story, as well as to some uncertainty about where the causal steps in the narrative begin. The only verse that mentions the circumcision of Isaac is in the P-source (Gen 21:4). The P-source verses are 1*a*, 2*b*–5. The J-source verses are 1*a*, 2*b*, and 7. Following those verses, the narrative is entirely from the E-source (Gen 21:6 and 8–21). Those verses note Sarah's laughter at having given birth to a son (6) and set the stage with the feast that Abraham makes for Isaac when he is weaned. The events of the plot are all in the E-source.

If one looks at the opening verses again, it is clear that although the circumcision ritual is not a causative step it provides an additional motivation for Sarah's actions in the redacted text. Her own son is part of the covenant with God. This motivation is not verbalized in the narrative, however. What is verbalized is in the E-source: Ishmael, "the son of that slave," in Sarah's words, should not share in the inheritance with *her* son, Isaac (21:9).

- Gen 26:12–33

Isaac builds an altar in this narrative, but that action is not the transformational event in the story, which includes various episodes in Isaac's life. In the narrative, after great success raising his flocks and building his household in Philistine territory, Isaac is harassed by herdsmen of Gerar, who stop up his wells. He moves, they harass him again, and he moves again. Their actions are the destabilizing events of the narrative (Gen 26:15, 19–20). After some success he moves to Beersheba and God visits him there. He builds an altar to God (Gen 26:23–24). Then the transformational event occurs: Abimelekh, king of Gerar, visits him and they swear to a treaty together (Gen 26:27–30). Functionally, Isaac's ritual of building an altar is an intermediate step in this narrative and can be interpreted as the step that Kafalenos terms "C-actant acquires empowerment," or step F.⁷¹

⁷¹ The Kafalenos paradigm for Gen 26:12–33 is in n. 44 in this chapter.

- Gen 28:46–29:9

The final narrative I examine in this group of rituals that are not in end-sections is from the P-source. It is affected by its proximity to a similar story from a different documentary source that precedes it. The two narratives share characters and both provide a reason for Jacob’s departure from his family to the east. In the first, the J-source narrative, the destabilizing perception is Isaac’s when he realizes, as he is getting old, that neither of his sons has received his blessing. The ritualized blessing that he gives to Jacob instead of Esau provides the key transition in *that* narrative (Gen 27:1–45).⁷²

In this P-source narrative there is also a blessing and Jacob also receives it from his father, but the blessing is not closural. It occurs *before* the transformation in the story. The transformation, as will be seen, occurs

⁷² Kafalenos paradigm, Gen 27:1–45, Blessing of Jacob by Isaac

	Function	Causal steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Equilibrium</i>	Neither son has been blessed by their father.
A (or a)	<i>Destabilizing event, or re-evaluation that reveals instability</i>	Isaac, before he dies, decides to bless his older son, Esau, 1–4.
C	<i>Decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A</i>	Rebekah overhears, 5a.
C'	<i>C-actants initial act to alleviate A or a</i>	Rebekah prepares her other son, Jacob, for the blessing, 5b.
D	<i>C-actant is tested</i>	Jacob protests to Rebekah that Isaac will recognize that he is not Esau, 11–12.
E	<i>C-actant responds to test</i>	Rebekah takes the onus of a possible curse upon herself, 13.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a</i>	Rebekah prepares Jacob to receive his father's blessing, with skins and food, 14–17.
I, or I (neg)	<i>Success (or failure) of H</i>	Isaac blesses Jacob, 27–29.
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	Jacob has the blessing of Isaac.

Epilogue: Esau tries to reverse the outcome, 27:30–40; Rebekah tries to protect Jacob from Esau’s fury 27:31–45.

when Jacob leaves so that he can marry someone from the extended family.⁷³

In the narrative Rebekah's statement destabilizes the status quo. She says to her husband, Isaac (Gen 27:46),

I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life be to me?

Isaac then acts to alleviate this condition. He calls for Jacob, blesses him, tells him to leave the region so that he can take a wife from Rebekah's family in Paddan-aram. The transformation follows as Isaac sends Jacob on his way to Paddan-aram to find a wife not from the local women but from Rebekah's own family in the east. The balance of the narrative (verses 6–9) is an epilogue in which Esau takes a non-Canaanite wife from the family of Ishmael as he tries to win his father's approval. The epilogue emphasizes the importance of endogamous marriage for the writers of the narrative.

⁷³ Kafalenos Paradigm for Gen 27:46–28:9, Jacob's Departure for the East

	Function	Causal steps in the narrative
EQ	<i>Initial equilibrium</i>	Jacob is not married; Esau has a native wife.
A (or a)	<i>Destabilizing event, or re-evaluation that reveals instability</i>	Rebekah doesn't want Jacob to marry a Hittite (native) woman, 27:46.
B	<i>Request that someone alleviate A or a</i>	Rebekah tells husband, Isaac, she doesn't want their son Jacob to marry a native woman, 27:46.
C ⁱ	<i>C-actant's initial act to alleviate A or a</i>	Isaac sends for Jacob and instructs him not to take a wife from among the local woman; he blesses him, 28:1–4.
H	<i>C-actant's primary action to alleviate A or a</i>	Isaac sends Jacob off, 28:5.
I, or I (neg)	<i>Success of H.</i>	Jacob leaves for Paddan-aram, 28:5.
EQ	<i>New equilibrium</i>	Jacob will not get a local wife, but presumably will acquire one where he is going.

Epilogue: Esau takes a new wife, Mahalath, who is not Canaanite, but is from Ishmael, 28:6–9. This supports the theme/motif of endogamous marriage.

This relatively brief story immediately follows the more dramatic J-source version of Jacob receiving the blessing and it has the same cast of characters. Thus reading the two narratives together might suggest that Rebekah's words about non-Canaanite women are a ruse to convince her husband to let Jacob leave, a means to protect her son from Esau's wrath. That certainly may have been the intent of the redactor. But within the context of the story as it is presented by the P-source author, and as it can be delineated by using the Kafalenos paradigm, Rebekah's words are the destabilizing action of the narrative. Jacob's departure to find a wife from Rebekah's family is then the alleviation that transforms the situation. The ritualized blessing may be incidental to the key transformation in the story, but on the other hand it connects this narrative with the Genesis tradition in which God's blessings are handed down from father to son.

These examples show that within their narratives, these rituals serve various narrative functions, but not that of bringing finality or stability to the new equilibrium of their stories. By contrast, those rituals that are in an end-section reflect a strategy of biblical authors to use them as a device to bring their stories to a stable conclusion.

6.7. *Summary*

The prevalence of a ritual to conclude a narrative—nearly half of the stories end this way—suggests that this was a conventional strategy among biblical writers. The types of rituals enacted are wide-ranging and include rituals for personal interactions with God, for political treaties, and for life-cycle events, like circumcision, blessing of a child by a father, marriage, and burial. The rituals reflect a special way of acting as people separate themselves from normal every-day modes; yet their actions are appropriate within the culture. Most of the rituals are described very briefly.

6.7.1. *Narrative Functions*

Although all the rituals effect some change for their narratives, they may provide the key transformative event, or not. The transformative rituals have within them the ability to resolve the destabilized condition that sets the plot in motion; these rituals bring about a new equilibrium in the story. Rituals related to treaties are particularly effective in this way.

From a structural standpoint, most end-section rituals do not provide the key transformations in their narratives. What they do instead is help bring the narratives to satisfactory conclusions in other ways. By

invoking the divine they project a sense that the new equilibrium is stable; by expressing the hierarchies between people and kings they establish equilibrium in society; by demonstrating the ritualized behavior of life-cycle events they perpetuate a stable society. These factors function within the narratives for the characters, and they function closurally outside the narrative events for readers. Readers recognize that the mere presence of a ritual—and the ritual may be marked with formulaic language to ensure that readers take note of them—can signify the end of that story. Rituals can redirect readers' focus away from the confines of the narrative plane when they refer to places or traditions or physical markers that readers may know or know about. This stops the forward movement of the narrative events and forms a natural end for the story.

The few rituals that are not in the end-sections may be the result of documentary issues, like Gen 21 or possibly Gen 26, where brief episodes were combined into a longer narrative. They may have different functions in the story, as the Cain and Abel ritual offerings where they *de*-stabilize the narrative. The ritual may connect with other narrative themes, like the continuation of the patriarchal blessings to the next generation in the P-source version of Jacob's departure for the east (Gen 28).

6.7.2. *Stability and Balancing Accounts*

I have noted in these pages that rituals help bring stability to the end of a narrative. One way of understanding the term stability is to look at the ritual process as "balancing the account," that is, a ritual establishes a better equalized and therefore more stable relationship between characters or between a character and God.⁷⁴ The need that people have to "repay" and re-balance accounts is expressed in Psalm 116:12–14:

⁷⁴ The concept that rituals are a means to "balance accounts" has been developed in contextual family therapy. Dr. Ivan Nagy, who has written with insight in this area, observes "Rituals are behavioral patterns which have traditionally dealt with contractual obligations among people and between God and man. Many ancient rituals were meant to balance unsettled accounts through sacrifice and through thanksgiving offerings. Wedding rituals formalized the rights of those who gave away the bride and the one who took the bride. Burial ceremonies... were meant to deal with the fears of unsettled accounts between the dead and the living. [This might include, for example, responsibilities unfulfilled, or harms done on specific occasions, etc.]... The bereaved ones had to face and accept their loss. The benefit of being blessed with a son also had to be requited through the offering of sacrifices. The ceremoniousness of courts reminds us of the traditional ritualistic significance of their societal function in that they legalize taking or giving of con-dign reparation and reward, that is, of reparations or reward equal in worth or dignity." See Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, M.D., and Geraldine M Spart, *Invisible Loyalties: Reciprocity*

How can I repay the Lord for all His bounties to me?
 I raise the cup of deliverance and invoke the name of the Lord
 I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people.⁷⁵

In stories about Jacob this can be demonstrated when Jacob and Laban make the treaty in Gal'ed after Jacob had departed secretly with his wife, children, and possessions from Laban's household to return to Canaan. God intervenes with Laban to prevent him from harming Jacob, and then Laban overtakes Jacob. Each man explains why he is unhappy and why the situation is unfair in his eyes: Laban says that Jacob should not have fled without letting him say goodbye to his family (31:26–28). Jacob retorts that he had worked for Laban for twenty years under terrible conditions and even now Laban would have sent him away empty-handed had he not fled with his family and possessions in secret (31:38–42). The ritual brings dignity and some sense of reparation to each side. It deals with the unfairness that each feels and it restores balance to the relationship. Laban is assured his daughters will be protected (31:50); and Jacob can continue on with his family and his possessions.

Balancing an account can also be observed in relationships between an individual and God. When Jacob builds an altar in Bethel (Gen 35:7), he explains that it is “to the God who answered me when I was in distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone” (35:3). He is settling up, repaying in a culturally appropriate manner what he perceives that he owes God. He fulfills vows that he made twenty years earlier when he was fleeing from his brother, Esau, and God had promised to protect him and bring him back to the land of Canaan (Gen 28).

6.7.3. *Natural Stopping Places*

Rituals related to life-cycle events or to surviving devastating occurrences in one's life can be natural stopping places. These rituals mark completion as well as the beginning of a new period.

Noah, after surviving the flood, builds an altar to God for burnt offerings (Gen 8:20–22). Abraham's circumcision of himself and his household marks the first occurrence of this life-cycle ritual in Israel (17:23–27). When Sarah dies and is buried, the ritual of her burial marks the end of

in *Intergenerational Family Therapy*, 75–76. I thank Chaim Horowitz for bringing this to my attention.

⁷⁵ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, 386–388, categorizes this as a thanksgiving psalm. In verse 17 the individual declares he will “sacrifice a thank offering” to God.

Abraham's grieving (23). Isaac's marriage to Rebekah marks the end of the search for a wife for him; it begins the period in which he loves and finds comfort in Rebekah (24). When Isaac is old and realizes that he will soon die, he feels that it is the proper time to confer on his son the blessings that he has received from God (27).

In this and the previous chapters I looked at the many types of devices that contribute to closure in these Genesis narratives. Next I examine the "why" of closure, that is, the philosophical, psychological, experiential, and psycho-linguistic components of this phenomenon. In the light of these I then look again at the destabilizing factors that are present at the ends of some of the narratives—factors that work *against* closure.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CLOSURE AND ANTI-CLOSURE: PHILOSOPHICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, EXPERIENTIAL, AND PSYCHO-LINGUISTIC COMPONENTS

7.1. *Introduction*

What is it about the nature of the narratives in Genesis, and in other literature as well, that leads to a reader's *acceptance* that a narrative is ending? If the story is enjoyable, a reader might ask why it has to end. Yet, as a story is progressing, once the key destabilizing action or condition is alleviated, a reader finds a level of satisfaction in the new equilibrium, even when other issues remain open. A reader of the Cain and Abel story, for example, may wonder about Cain's experience on his journey to Nod or what happened after he settled there. When Abraham arrives in Canaan, is he concerned about whether the inhabitants of the land will accept him in their midst? In the story in which Jacob instead of Esau is blessed by his father Isaac (Gen 27), the narrative ends before the reader learns what Jacob will actually gain from that blessing. And, why did Isaac proceed with an irrevocable blessing since he suspected that this son was not Esau (Gen 27:18–40)?¹

But these questions are not addressed. Instead, in each of these narratives, the precipitating issue that was defined gets resolved. Cain is banished from the land that he caused to be cursed; Abraham hears God's directive, then leaves his homeland and comes to Canaan; Jacob has the blessing. For the reader, once the destabilizing effects of an action or situation have been dealt with and there is a new equilibrium, the story can conclude.

Resolution of the destabilizing event is the prime ingredient in the process of concluding a narrative—the process known as closure. In

¹ Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, has collected *aggadot*, stories in the “nonlegal tradition of the rabbis who lived in Roman Palestine and Babylonia in the first six centuries of the Common Era” (xv). The stories about Cain, Abraham, and Jacob indicate that the questions raised above were likely to be asked by those rabbis as well. See *Legends*, p. 111 (with sources pp. 112–114); pp. 182–187 (with sources p. 188), and 251–274 (with sources pp. 253–255, 256–257, 262–263, 267–268, 270–271, 273–274).

the previous chapters, I detailed strategies and forms that biblical writers used to mark the end boundary of a narrative and enhance the sense of finality, stability, and integrity at the end. Many literary devices, including forms of repetitions, plus rituals, etiologies, and proverbs, support closure.

In this chapter I investigate underlying aspects of closure—how it is a process and how it relates to the integrity of a narrative. I present philosophical, psychological, experiential, and psycho-linguistic elements that affect both writer and reader. I then look at some of the Genesis narratives that, despite various closural devices, end with an incomplete sense of closure.

7.2. Closure as a Process

The active, procedural aspect of closure becomes apparent when closure is contrasted with the word “end.” The term “end” marks a point in space or time; it presumes a limit or boundary,² just as the term “end-section,” which is used in this study, marks the final section of the narrative.³ In literature, the term “end” has the sense of “a completed process of change, either in external circumstances or in internal consciousness.”⁴

The term closure was originally used spatially. When it was applied to literature it became a theoretical construct used metaphorically primarily for describing the *process* of getting *to* the end.⁵ The term closure can also be used to describe the concluding *section* of a narrative, that is, the “closural section,” or what I call the “end-section” in this study. The same term has also been utilized to describe the measure of *satisfaction* that a reader feels at the end or the degree to which conflicts are resolved and tensions released.⁶ This last understanding of closure is used today in psychology

² David Hult, “Editor’s Preface,” in *Concepts of Closure*, iv, relates “closure” to its Latin origin as a participial form of the verb *claudere*, “to shut or close.”

³ In narratology, when a plot is abstracted, the term “end” may also be used for the final incident; see Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, 26.

⁴ David H. Richter, *Fable’s End: Completeness and Closure in Rhetorical Fiction*, vii. Italics are added.

⁵ Hult, *Concepts of Closure*, iv, refers to this figurative use of the term closure.

⁶ Don Fowler, “Second Thoughts on Closure,” in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, 3. Fowler enumerates the various uses for the term “closure” in literature.

to describe a sense of personal resolution or a feeling that an emotionally difficult experience has been conclusively settled or accepted.⁷

7.3. *Closure and the Integrity of the Narrative*

As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, the process of closure in the end-section of a biblical narrative reflects more than the resolution of the destabilizing event. One aspect of successful closure is that the end reflects honesty or “integrity.” Integrity is achieved on several levels. The values and authority system presumed or expressed earlier in the narrative or in related stories should be consistent.⁸ Another indication of integrity is the coherence at the end with readers’ own experiences in life and with their observations of the characters up to that point in the story. When the end demonstrates this consistency, readers sense the honesty of the narrative and its integrity as a work of art.

Marianna Torgovnick describes the importance of honesty or integrity for nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels.⁹ An ending must be appropriate and honest, and it must have a credible relationship with what has occurred at the beginning and in the middle of the novel. For Torgovnick, a work need not resolve all thematic and aesthetic elements as long as the reader accepts its honesty and integrity relative to these areas: first, the author’s preoccupations (that would include moral values and authority); second, the experience of the reader (based on what has occurred earlier in the work); she adds a third area, the work’s shape, that is, its structure defined geometrically as circular or parallel. In a similar way the Genesis frames that begin and end a story can be understood geometrically as forming a circle in which the two points meet each other.

But to Torgovnick the integrity or honesty in an ending is most important; the closural value of integrity overrides other factors in the closural process, even such things as issues left unresolved.¹⁰ One could argue that she takes this position because novels, because of their size or

⁷ OED online, “Closure,” Draft Additions December 2006.

⁸ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, 24–25, first used the term “integrity” to describe the relationship of parts in poetry (meter), in music (organized sound), and in physical art (internal structure).

⁹ Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, 5–8. On p. 6, she explains that she uses the term “honesty” where Smith had used the term “integrity.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5–8.

complexity, can afford to leave aspects unresolved. But one should point out that even in the short narratives in this study, some questions are not answered at the end. Sometimes those effects are minimal, but sometimes they work against closure, as is demonstrated below in my discussion of “anti-closure.”

The three aspects of integrity that Torgovnick describes for novels are important for closure in the endings of biblical narratives. The first two, the author’s preoccupations and the reader’s experience, are often affected by events beyond the borders of a particular narrative. In their contexts in the Book of Genesis, all the narratives follow the P-source creation story (Gen 1–2:4a) and are affected by it. In that narrative, cause and effect are established and God’s role as the supreme authority of all that occurs is established. As the narrator explains, in the midst of a disorganized “welter and waste,” God takes command.¹¹ He organizes and stabilizes the universe. He issues statements that cause the world to come into being in an orderly fashion. He expresses his own satisfaction with the steps in the process, indicated by the judgment words “good” (*tov*) and “very good” (*tov me’od*) and by blessings that he bestows on animate life.¹² The narrator describes these events as the history of our world, “the ‘story’ (*toledot*) of heaven and earth when they were created.”

God’s authority and the relationship between cause and effect carry over into everything that occurs in subsequent narratives. Ethical and moral values are defined and the norms of conduct that God expects from man are prescribed. Readers observe the consequences of disobeying God from the Adam and Eve story; they learn that humans are not to shed the blood of another human from the Cain and Abel story.¹³ The covenant between God and mankind is introduced, first with Noah and then

¹¹ The translation of *tohu wabohu* as “welter and waste” comes from Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 17; his translation approximates the alliteration of the Hebrew.

¹² The judgments identified with the word “*tov*” are usually translated as “good.” *Tov* in Hebrew has many nuances. Nahum Sarna, *JTS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, 7, interprets the use of “*tov*” in Gen 1 as a formula of divine approval. He relates this to the religion of Israel since it indicates that “reality is imbued with God’s goodness” and sets the stage for understanding evil “on the moral and not the mythological plane.” In the J-source creation narrative that follows Gen 1, the word “*tov*” is used in two of its nuances. First it means appropriate or pleasing, in the phrase “good for food (*tov lema’akhal*),” and then it is used in an ethical sense in the phrase “tree of knowledge of good and bad (*tov vara*).” See *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, 309, “*Tov*.”

¹³ Later narrative examples include the story of the wood-gatherer on Shabbat (Num 15:32–36); legal examples include the covenant at Sinai (Ex 19:1–20:21) and the Book of the Covenant (Exod 21:1–24:18).

with Abraham. As the Pentateuch unfolds, Gregory Mobley points out, narratives and laws demonstrate the ethical relationship between cause and effect:

The essence of the covenant the biblical writers and audiences saw embodied in the natural world and claimed to have seen etched in stone on Mt Sinai was ethical cause and effect.¹⁴

The refinement of that ethical system in the narratives and the narratives' adherence to it is reassuring to readers and demonstrates an author's integrity, as defined by Torgovnick and others.¹⁵ The punishments meted out to Adam, Eve, and Cain, and the rewards bestowed upon Abraham as the stories end reassure readers that the system of cause and effect and of moral values and authority is in place and valid. When a character invokes God in a ritual in the end-section, as do Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the integrity of this action correlates honestly with what readers have learned about the role of God throughout the stories. God intercedes on behalf of those loyal to him. In two wife-sister stories God helps Abraham, first in Egypt when "The Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abram" (Gen 12:17), and later in Gerar, when God appears to Abimelekh in a dream (Gen 20:3–7).

Torgovnick's insistence on the existence of moral order is seconded in Elizabeth J. MacArthur's analysis of epistolary novels. For a narrative to have satisfactory closure, MacArthur explains, there must be a belief (which is held by the reader and demonstrated by the narrator) that there will be moral meaning in the story. "The existence of a moral order [is necessary] to guarantee...the text's stability and meaningfulness."¹⁶ When a narrative seems to challenge that system or does not express the values readers expect, readers may feel discomfort with the ending. Jacob, the third of the patriarchs of Israel, acquires the birthright of the oldest son improperly and receives his father's blessing through

¹⁴ Gregory Mobley, "The Return of the Chaos Monsters: A Biblical Myth," SBL Forum, 2–3.

¹⁵ See also Elizabeth J. MacArthur, *Extravagant Narrative: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form*, 271–274.

¹⁶ Ibid., 274. John Gerlach, *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story*, 11, uses the word moral to refer to a didactic theme, that is, the point made as it emerges in the story. An example of Gerlach's "manifestation of the moral" in the Genesis narratives would be Jacob's statement in his dream in Gen 28:10–21 when he says, "Surely the Lord is present in this place and I did not know it."

deceit (Genesis 25:19–26 and 27:1–45). Subsequent stories about Jacob confirm that the narrator, too, was troubled by Jacob's behavior.¹⁷

7.4. *The Expectation of Closure—Familiarity and Integrity*

If readers are familiar with other biblical stories, the integrity of the ending is enhanced when the author adheres to what they know. Readers who become familiar with forms and language found at the ends of the narratives are primed for closure when they notice one of these devices. Thus, the closural force of a device is enhanced because readers are familiar with it. The short narratives in Genesis share forms, themes, words, and motifs that tend to occur at their ends. These include rituals, proverbs, and etiologies; motifs of departure or remaining someplace; frames and repetitions that reflect the new equilibrium; and hyperbole, didactic pronouncements, and summary statements.¹⁸ In addition, style changes

¹⁷ The issue of how Jacob was viewed by ancient readers is discussed by Susan Niditch in *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*, by Nahum Sarna in *JTS Torah Commentary*, 397–398, and more recently by Michael James Williams in *Deception in Genesis: An Investigation in the Morality of a Unique Biblical Phenomenon*. Niditch looks at the Jacob stories as a *Bildungsroman*, a tale whose main theme is the formative years or spiritual education of one person, 70. She argues that the underdog/trickster “held special appeal for the Israelite composers who shaped the tales of their ancestral heroes” and that the Bible is full of tricksters, a subtype of underdog. “Throughout its history . . . Israel has had a peculiar self-image as the underdog and the trickster themes of enslavement and escape, exile and restoration, and Israel’s origins as a mixed multitude” support this image, xi–xii. Niditch relates this type of character to the “universal folk hero [who] brings about change in a situation via trickery.” Sarna agrees that the “successful application of shrewd opportunism was well respected in the ancient Near East as it is in contemporary society,” but he demonstrates that in the larger context of the Jacob stories, the narrator indicates that Jacob’s behavior with regard to the birthright was “duplicious.” In subsequent stories the narrator relates Jacob’s relationship with Laban, who tricks him and then tracks him when he flees years later (Gen 29:25 and Chapter 31). The narrator also describes Jacob’s mortal fear of Esau (32:4–33:16), his violent encounter with a man/divine being (32:25–33), the violation of his daughter Dinah (Chapter 34), and the death of his beloved Rachel (35:16–20). Michael Williams weighs in on the side of Sarna and questions Niditch’s theoretical and methodological use of folklore, 193–220. He compares various accounts of trickery in Genesis and shows that specifically for Genesis, “only when deception is perpetrated by someone who has been wronged by another, so that the previous status quo, or *shalom*, is reached (without, therefore, causing harm to the deceived), does the narrative evaluate the event positively,” 56. He demonstrates that deception stories in other biblical books are acceptable when they serve to benefit members of the trickster’s group or the group as a whole, 59–82. Post-biblical amplifications of the Jacob narrative prove that the deception was viewed negatively in later years, 222–223.

¹⁸ In the end-sections, as discussed above, rituals are found in Gen 12:1–9, 13:1–18, etc. (Chapter 6); etiologies in the end-sections of Gen 1–2:4a, 2:4–25, 11:1–9, etc. (Chapter 5);

alert one to an end; the change can be from prose to poetry or to a more authoritative language. Certain words, such as “hence” (*‘al ken*) or “that is why” (*lakhen*), mark a final explanation. Other words mark departure or a person’s remaining when others have left: “to return” (*š.w.b*) and “to remain [somewhere]” (*y.š.b*).

These devices provide an “expectation of closure.”¹⁹ In the poetry that Barbara Herrnstein Smith analyzes, readers’ familiarity with the fourteen-line sonnet form influences them: they know that a sonnet will end upon completion of fourteen lines. But with more flexible forms, other traditions inform the reader. John Gerlach, writing about short stories, explains that there is a “communal literary tradition, one that has developed over time and one which the [short story] writer assumes his readers share.”²⁰ The many ending devices used regularly at the ends of biblical narratives suggest that those writers drew upon a communal literary tradition with which the reader was familiar.

Integrity is supported if the characterizations and events are consistent with what readers already “know” from previous stories and from the current one. The integrity of the character Abraham is shown in his interactions with God in Gen 12 and 13 and then in the narrative in which he goes to battle to rescue his nephew Lot (Gen 14). In the end-section of Gen 14, when the two kings come to him, Abraham’s personal integrity is an emphatic closural note. He refuses to take the spoils of war that the king of Sodom offers him; he only accepts, on their behalf, what his retainers have personally expended. At the end of Gen 24,²¹ Isaac’s happiness when he finally meets Rebekah assures the reader that Abraham’s line will continue; this is just what God had promised Abraham earlier (Gen 15, 17). Reinforcement of a less favorable impression also helps create

words meaning to depart or to remain or stay in Gen 2:4b–3:24, 15:1–21 (Chapter 4); the motif of banishment as a punishment in Gen 1:2–4a, 4:1–16 (Chapters 3 and 4).

¹⁹ Gerlach, *Toward the End*, 162. Helmut Bonheim, *Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story*, 118–169, observes that specific types of activity or inactivity (he terms these “narrative modes”) affect whether a story feels closed at the end. Stories that end with description or comment feel more closed than stories that end with a report or with speech; some stories had a combination of these types. Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, 123, observes that over time Henry James came to end his novels with a “scenic ending” (similar to Bonheim’s “descriptive” ending).

²⁰ Gerlach, *Toward the End*, 162.

²¹ In this long narrative, Abraham tells his servant that his son’s wife must come from the land of Abraham’s birth and that she herself must be willing to come to Canaan. When the servant finds Rebekah she agrees to come (Gen 24: 4.8, 67).

a sense of integrity. Jacob's trickery, noted above, gets repaid by the deceit of his father-in-law Laban (Gen 27 and 29–30).²²

7.5. *The Expectation of Closure*

7.5.1. *Metaphysics and Psychology*

Readers also bring expectations of closure that don't necessarily come from within the text. When a reader perceives closure, he may be relating to expectations of a certain type of structure, such as the one that Aristotle noted in the fourth century BCE when he wrote that a tragedy must have a beginning, a middle, and an end.²³ In modern times, Frank Kermode, drawing from the Bible and especially from the New Testament's apocalyptic tradition, offered psychological and metaphysical explanations for the Aristotelian paradigm. Kermode suggests that the human sense of endings (and beginnings) is shaped by our general conceptions of life, of society, and of the universe. When we create literature, we create plots that resemble the "fictions" that we use to make sense of the world.²⁴ So we create novels, poems, and stories with beginnings, middles, and ends. Even when experience may be at odds with the accepted pattern of beginning-middle-end:

We still feel a need, harder than ever to satisfy because of an accumulated skepticism, to experience that concordance of beginning, middle, and end which is the essence of our explanatory fictions, and especially when they belong to cultural traditions which treat historical time as primarily rectilinear rather than cyclic.²⁵

The need to make coherent narrative patterns with beginnings, middles, and ends may be grounded in how the human brain works. A recent

²² See n. 17, above.

²³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, Hammond Edition, 20. "To be whole is to have a beginning, a middle and an end. A beginning is that which of necessity does not follow something else and of its very nature must be followed by some event or happening. An end is just the opposite; of its very nature it must follow something else either inevitably or generally so, and it must not be followed by anything else. A middle is that which follows something and is succeeded by something. Well-constructed plots should then not begin nor end casually." The corresponding passages Hammond cites for this summary are in the Oxford Classical Text of 1911 as follows: 1450 b 21, 1451 a 19, 1451 a 30–35, 1451 a 36–38, 1451 b 29–32, 1459 a 21–29, 1459 a 16–21.

²⁴ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 35–36, argues that these fictions remain even when events occur that disprove them.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

article in the journal *Psychological Science* explains that people “naturally assemble mental representations of expected associations that organize their beliefs and perceptions, and provide them with a general feeling that their lives make sense.”²⁶ Hayden White demonstrates how writers of history use the “beginning, middle, end” narrative structure (rather than an annalistic approach) to explain how changes in history lead to a different situation.²⁷ In terms of the literary paradigm used in this study, the “different situation” in history that White speaks of is analogous to the “new equilibrium” at the end of a narrative. The beginning-middle-end form can be applied to spoken narrative, as the studies of William Labov eloquently demonstrate.²⁸ It can also be applied to children’s literature and, of course, to the novels, dramas, and short stories studied by academicians who investigate closure.

7.5.2. *Gestalt Psychology and Its Temporal Implications*

Studies based on gestalt psychology indicate that the ability of the reader to perceive the wholeness of a narrative and to perceive and accept that it is drawing to a close may be related to the innate ability of human beings to visualize the wholeness of a physical object. According to the principles of gestalt psychology, human thinking patterns are such

²⁶ Travis Proulx and Steven J. Heine, “Connections from Kafka: Exposure to Meaning Threats Improves Implicit Learning of an Artificial Grammar,” *Psychological Science* 20, no. 9 (2009): 1125–1131. The authors correlate the results of various scientific studies with observations made by Albert Camus and Franz Kafka. “According to Camus,” they explain, this “*longing for clarity, for associations that are internally coherent and consistent with one’s environment, underlines the construction of all meaning frameworks*, whether they organize scientific observation, religious observance, or plans for a weekend barbeque,” 1125 (italics added).

²⁷ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 2, writes, “I will consider the historical work as what it manifestly is—that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing them*.” Using what he calls a “formalist” method, White seeks to “identify the structural components of those accounts,” 4. As Wallace Martin explains in *Recent Theories of Narrative*, 72–74, although fictional and historical narratives appear to be entirely different, “the two narrators face the same problem: that of showing how a situation at the *beginning* of a temporal series leads to a different situation at its *end*.”

²⁸ William Labov, *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, 354–396, observes, “A complete narrative begins with an orientation, proceeds to the complicating action, is suspended at the focus of evaluation before the resolution, concludes with the resolution, and returns the listener to the present time with the coda.” Labov notes that for these vernacular narratives, the evaluation forms a secondary structure that is concentrated in the evaluation section but may be found in various forms throughout the narrative,” 368.

that the parts do not exist prior to the whole.²⁹ The parts derive their character from the structure of the organized whole. For the mind to perceive the organized whole, gestalt psychology explains that our minds even add missing elements to complete a figure. We also group similar elements (form, color, size, etc.) into an entity; we group together elements that are physically or chronologically close, and we also group symmetrical images. Once forms are established, the mind decides that certain forms are physically in the foreground and that others are in the background. The function of establishing “wholes” has been shown to apply to more than visual images; it applies to thought processes, to memories, and to our understanding of time.³⁰ Gestalt theories have been applied to art, to education, and to computer design. B. H. Smith suggests that the functional ability to perceive an entity may be transferred to literature.³¹ The emergence of the whole object in space is analogous, she explains, to the completion, in time, of a poem.

The gestalt connection to literature was examined by Tanya Reinhart, who looked more closely at the relationship between gestalt perception, which is spatial and visual, and narrative perception, which takes place over time.³² Reinhart suggests that the mental strategies and ability that a person uses to visually perceive a whole object on a background is extended, in the reading process, to having the ability to perceive the wholeness of a narrative in time.³³ She concludes:

As is well known, temporal concepts are largely constructed via such metaphorical extensions (much of our vocabulary for temporal relations

²⁹ Dagobert D. Runes, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy*, 134. The term gestalt comes from the German for “shape or form.” Gestalt psychology was a reaction against an analytic approach.

³⁰ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol I, 3, argues that our understanding of time is established by our ability to structure narratives. “Time becomes human time [that is, not an abstraction] to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.”

³¹ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 33, 36, note, and 41.

³² Tanya Reinhart, “Principles of Gestalt Perception in the Temporal Organization of Narrative Texts.” Reinhart suggests that in narrative there is a temporal skeleton that is comparable to the term “foreground” in gestalt theory. Her term “temporal skeleton” functions in the same way as the plot in a narrative, with its causal relationships, described in Chapter 2. The temporal skeleton is the foreground material; background material includes description, interpretation, etc.

³³ Walter R. Bodine, in his introduction to *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature*, 8, explains how linguistic methods of discourse analysis can be used to indicate “backgrounded” events by analyzing, for example, “tense-aspect morphology of the verb, word order, particles, or the use of active and passive voice.”

originates in spatial relations).³⁴ This would mean that the spatial relations (governed by the gestalt principles) are the first and most basic thing we learn, and we then extend these relations to temporal systems.³⁵

A good literary example might be the way we diagram chiasms, and even the name “*chiasm*” itself, which is based on the spatial image of the Greek letter *chi* (χ). In Gen 9:6, for example, the key words “shed—blood—man” repeat as “man—blood—shed,” a chiastically structured order, that is, A-B-C, C-B-A.³⁶

B. H. Smith’s observation that the reader can perceive the wholeness of a poem underlies her understanding of closure.³⁷ She says that the reader becomes aware of forms and themes as he reads. Forms include patterned elements such as rhyme, alliteration, and meter. Themes are formed by other patterns—the repetitions of words, syntax, and tone. Form and theme, according to Smith’s definitions,³⁸ establish the structure of a poem, which a reader observes. The reader expects that for a certain amount of time the rhymes will continue and that the theme will be supported by related language. The reader also expects that the poem will end once the expectations of the structure and theme have been met. Or, a frame—that is, a repetition of opening words or themes—will signify completion. At that point the reader will be satisfied that a poem is ended.

³⁴ As Reinhart noted in “Principles of Gestalt Perception,” a spatial component can be observed in some words used temporally. According to etymologies and prime usages found in the Oxford English Dictionary Online, these temporal words have spatial antecedents: “Before” (OTeut. **forana* from the front); “after” (Goth. *aftra* back, *aftaro* from behind); “at” (multiple meanings), but prime relates to “Local position; answering the question *Where?* (passing into *Whereby?* *Whence?* *Whither?*); “midst” as in “in the midst of”; “on,” as in “on time” (“*On* expresses primarily the relation of contact with or proximity to the surface of something, and so that of being supported or upheld by it; also from the earliest times expressing motion to or toward such a position”).

³⁵ Reinhart, “Principles of Gestalt Perception,” 805.

³⁶ In Genesis 9:6, the italicized words repeat in chiastic order: “Whoever *sheds* the *blood* of *man*, by *man* shall his *blood* be *shed*.” See Chapter 3. In Chapter 2, chiasm as part of the frame of a narrative is discussed in conjunction with Gen 8:22.

³⁷ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*. Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, also focuses on patterns and devices. Others concentrate on different aspects of closure. Robert Adams, *The Strains of Discord*, focuses on the concept of aesthetic coherence. Richter, *Fable’s End*, looks at the didacticism of some novels. Kermode’s *Sense of an Ending*, as noted above, focuses on the apocalyptic impulse that is transferred to literature. For classic Greek tragedy, see Francis M. Dunn, *Tragedy’s End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama*.

³⁸ For B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, the structure of a poem, as it unfolds, is the sum of its forms and themes. By forms she means the patterning of elements derived from the physical nature of words—rhyme, alliteration, syllabic meter, 7; by themes she means the patterning elements derived from the symbolic or conventional nature of words, and this includes reference to syntax, tone, temporal sequence, and quantitative sequence.

Smith notes, "Our pleasure comes not in having *all* expectations gratified, but in seeing what the poem does with our expectations."³⁹

When Smith looks at poems that tell a story, that is, at narrative poems, the wholeness that she perceives in lyric poetry is augmented by additional closural elements. In narrative poems, she notes, "the conclusion coincides with the last event related, [and] closure may be secured as in drama and fiction."⁴⁰ She shows that the conclusion may include a framing comment and a thematically implied termination point. These correspond to literary frames and to resolutions of destabilizing events in the end-sections of prose biblical narratives. For narrative and lyric poetry, she demonstrates that the reader's awareness of forms and themes leads to expectations that must be met for the end to be successfully closural.

When a poem ends, the reader is satisfied because he comprehends the wholeness and completeness of the text that the author has written. (Smith does accept that sometimes the reader becomes aware of these elements only in retrospect, after a poem has ended.) For the following poem by Robert Frost, for example, Smith demonstrates how closure is the complex product of the interrelationship between logical sequence ("first-early-hour-subsidies, sank, goes down..." and also "but...so...so") and figurative language ("gold-early leaf-hour-grief..."). Both contribute to the theme of the transitory nature of things in life that one would have assumed are permanent:

"Nothing Gold Can Stay"⁴¹
 Nature's first green is gold,
 Her hardest hue to hold.
 Her early leaf's a flower;
 But only so an hour.
 Then leaf subsides to leaf.
 So Eden sank to grief,
 So dawn goes down to day.
 Nothing gold can stay.⁴²

Smith's analysis of what contributes to closure in this poem includes modifications of the word "gold" in the first line as it moves from being a color, to a suggestion of its ephemeral nature as a budding shape, and

³⁹ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 124–126. Smith provides, as an example, John Milton's sonnet "Down by the Salley Gardens."

⁴¹ Ibid., 135.

⁴² *The Complete Poems of Robert Frost*, 272.

finally to a figurative symbol of things thought to be permanent (like Eden or ‘solid gold’) but which are in fact transitory. Smith concludes:

Thus, by the end of the seventh line, the universality of the impermanence of *gold* has already been established, and in its terms, the conclusion is as valid as it is inevitable.⁴³

The reader’s expectations and perception of wholeness, described by Smith, are also presumed by Meir Sternberg and Robert Alter. Sternberg’s close reading uses a broad range of devices, including awareness of gaps and repetitions, to discern the coherence of a text.⁴⁴ Alter explains that in a biblical narrative, structure and theme are determined by careful choices of words, reported details, and syntax, the pace of narration and small movements of dialogue, and the intentional analogies and linguistic connections between stories. Unlike Alter and Sternberg, however, Smith explicitly demonstrates how the process of linguistic and thematic development leads inexorably to closure.

7.6. *Anti-Closure*⁴⁵

7.6.1. *Overview*

In a strict sense, the narratives in Genesis are never “closed.” Characters, events, and narrator’s observations connect into the future, beyond the

⁴³ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 137.

⁴⁴ The literary observations of Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, are discussed briefly in Chapter 2. As pointed out there, Sternberg assumes that the narrator is authoritative, reflecting the omniscience of God. The use of gaps and repetitions, among other devices, is there in the text to provide clues for the reader so that with study, readers can come to understand the meaning of the text.

⁴⁵ As the prefix suggests, in literature “anti-closure” refers to those elements in a narrative (or poem or drama) that work against the process of closure. Anti-closure devices are understood to bring about openness at the end, a sense that a narrative does not feel sufficiently closed and stable. The term “anti-closure” has not found its way into the online Oxford English Dictionary, which is updated quarterly. See proxy.library.upenn.edu:2340/help/updates/.

In literary studies, the term “anti-closure” is not uncommon. See, for example, the discussions in Walter B. Crouch, “To Question an End, to End a Question: Opening the Closure of the Book of Jonah,” *JSOT* 62 (1994): 101–112; Dunn, “Ends and Means in Euripides’ *Heracles*,” in *Classical Closure*; Fowler, “Second Thoughts on Closure,” in *Classical Closure*; Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, 84–85; B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure* 42, 57, 76, 147, 233–234, 237–238, 240–256; Roberts, “Afterword: Ending and Aftermath, Ancient and Modern” in *Classical Closure*.

events in the narrative. Adam and Eve depart from the Garden of Eden and end that story, but in the next they have children who become the focus of *that* story (Cain and Abel). Still later it is noted that Eve bears another son, Seth, who is, in turn, a forebear of Noah. Foreshadowing within the end-section can blur the temporal close. After the boy Ishmael is saved in the desert outside of Beersheba, foreshadowing extends the frame to his adulthood (Gen 21). The narrator describes his future life as a bowman in the wilderness and his marriage to a woman from Egypt. An etiology in the end-section has a similar effect, extending the time of the narrative by connecting to events and places observable at a later time.

Stories can be “not closed” in another way as well. Sometimes readers finish a story with a sense that something relatively important is unresolved. They sense that the finality and stability normally found at the ends of narratives is missing. This is relatively rare in the Genesis stories but can be observed in two narratives, the *Akedah* and the story of Dinah (Gen 22 and 34). In the second part of this chapter (beginning in Section 7.3), I discuss these narratives and investigate the specific anti-closural devices and factors that contribute to an open, or destabilized, end.

7.6.2. *Closed Narratives that Have Anti-Closural Elements*

Wallace Martin uses the term “drift into the future” for narratives that “lack closure in the strict sense.”⁴⁶ The “drift” in these narratives occurs after the transformation, when the new equilibrium is in place. But instability does not ensue because the new equilibrium is not compromised. Instead, the devices that produce the drift contribute to the finality, stability, or integrity of the new equilibrium or to ongoing themes in the Genesis narratives.

In the first Abraham narrative, after Abraham has come to Canaan and builds two altars there, the final verse states, “Then Abraham journeyed by stages toward the Negev” (Gen 12:9).⁴⁷ The “drift into the future,” of this description does not change the new equilibrium and actually adds to

⁴⁶ Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative*, 84. Martin focuses on the role of an epilogue to bring events to a later time, but the “drift” may occur without a separate epilogue in the Genesis narratives.

⁴⁷ The description of Abraham’s ongoing travels through the land is not detailed at all, and is in the category of an “iterative repetition” described in Chapter 3.

the integrity of the story: Abraham is moving about in the new land that God promised him.

More detailed “moving about” follows the transformation in Gen 13, after Lot and Abraham have separated and Lot moves with his flocks and household to the plain of the Jordan near Sodom and Abraham remains in Canaan. God then repeats his promise to Abraham; Abraham moves about the land and at the terebinths of Mamre in Hebron he builds another altar to God. These details are closural, supporting the new equilibrium. God renews his promise to Abraham alone, and Abraham demonstrates his commitment to God.⁴⁸

The future life of Ishmael is foretold after the narrative’s transforming moment (Gen 21). After he was saved in the wilderness, God was “with the boy and he grew up; he dwelt in the wilderness and became a bowman . . . in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt” (Gen 21:20–21). These statements demonstrate that God fulfills his commitment to Abraham, as he had promised before Ishmael was sent away: “As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed” (Gen 21:13).

The effect of the many etiologies in end-sections is closural, although they too allow readers to move to a time closer to their own. They form a cognitive bridge to ancient readers and sometimes to later readers as well; realities of society, like pain in childbirth and the toil of work explained in Gen 2–3, are ongoing. When Jacob/Israel wrestles with a man/divine being and his hip is wrenched at its socket, the narrator explains a food tradition observed by “children of Israel to this day” (Gen 32:23–33). As discussed in Chapter 5, the many etiologies and the proverbs identified in that chapter may extend the temporal reach of the story as they connect with readers, but their primary effect is that they halt the forward action of the plot.

⁴⁸ In the ancient Near East a man who was childless could adopt a child or an adult who would then inherit from him. See, Laws of Hammurabi, 191; Sumerian Handbook Lawbook of Forms, (iv. 25–30), in Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 119 and 50. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 193, includes the *aggadah* of Lot’s servants, who assume that Lot will inherit all that is Abraham’s because Abraham will never have children.

7.6.3. *Anti-Closure in the Dinah Story (Gen 34)*

The narrative of Dinah, daughter of Jacob and Leah, begins as she “went out to visit the daughters of the land” (Gen 34:1).⁴⁹ She is seen and raped by Shechem, son of a Hivite clan chief, Hamor, who then falls in love with her and asks his father to obtain her for him as a wife (Gen 34:2–4). Meanwhile, Jacob, who has heard about the abduction, keeps silent while his sons are in the fields; the sons, hearing the news, return and are distressed (Gen 34:5–7).

Hamor comes to Jacob and his sons and asks for Dinah’s hand for Shechem, promising benefits to Jacob’s clan, including intermarriage with members of his clan and the offer to dwell among them and acquire holdings in their land (Gen 34:6, 8–12). Jacob’s sons respond—here the narrator comments that they are speaking with guile because Shechem had defiled their sister—and they promise that if all the males in Hamor’s clan agree to be circumcised they will accede to Shechem’s proposal of marriage with Dinah (Gen 34:13–17). Hamor and Shechem convince their townsmen to be circumcised (Gen 34:18–24).

⁴⁹ Kafalenos Paradigm for Gen 34, Dinah

	Function	Steps in the narrative
A	<i>Destabilizing event</i>	Shechem takes Dinah, lays with her by force, 2.
B	<i>Request that someone alleviate A</i>	Shechem asks his father for her as a wife, 4.
C	<i>Decision to alleviate</i>	Jacob learns about it but keeps silent until his sons come home, 5. Sons hear, come in, and are very angry at the “outrage in Israel” (<i>nebalah ‘asah byisrael</i>), a thing not to be done, 7.
D	<i>Test of C-actant</i>	Hamor and Shechem ask for Dinah and offer intermarriage with their clan, land open for them, and other gifts, 12.
E	<i>Response of C-actant</i>	Sons answer with guile, requesting circumcision, 13–17.
F	<i>Empowerment for C-actant</i>	Hamor and Shechem convince their people to be circumcised, 18–24.
G	<i>C-actant arrives at place for H</i>	Simeon and Levi come to the city, 25.
H	<i>Primary action</i>	Simeon and Levi kill all males including Hamor and Shechem; take Dinah, 25–26. (Other) sons plunder the town, 28–29.
I	<i>Positive or negative</i>	Two evaluations of the final action: Jacob negative, 30; Simeon and Levi, positive, 31.

On the third day after the circumcision, “when they [the men of the town] were in pain” two of the brothers, Simeon and Levi, kill all the males and take Dinah out of Shechem’s house (Gen 34:25–26). That is the transforming event which establishes a new equilibrium between Jacob’s family and Hamor’s. The other sons of Jacob then plunder the town, destroying or taking all that is left (Gen 34:27–29).⁵⁰ The source of the problem in the narrative is resolved and the story seems to end, but of course it doesn’t. A separate and destabilizing scene follows. Jacob tells Simeon and Levi that their actions have brought trouble upon him from the inhabitants of the land, leading to the possibility that “I and my house will be destroyed” (Gen 34:30). They answer, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?” (Gen 34:31).

That final scene brings in tangential elements that destabilize what at first appeared to be the new equilibrium, stable on the level of the plot, which could have closed the story. Dinah is (presumably) returned to her family; the perpetrators of the shame, Shechem and his father, as well as the whole town that went along with them, have been destroyed. Instead of stability, however, the equilibrium is questioned. It becomes unstable as disagreements emerge within the family, disagreements that have not been expressed before this moment. Some tangential information is presented: readers learn that Jacob views his family as a beleaguered minority “few in number” (*meṭei mispar*) now threatened by the aggressive action taken by his sons against their neighbors (Gen 34:30). To Simeon and Levi, the family’s honor and its ethical and moral values override all other concerns. The two sides are stubborn; neither will compromise and, most importantly, the disagreement is not resolved as the story ends.⁵¹

Tangentially connected information that is brought into a narrative at the end has been identified as an anti-closural device in novels and

⁵⁰ The English translation in JPS for Gen 34:27 suggests that Simeon and Levi were not involved in the plunder. It begins: “The *other* sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered. . . .” The Hebrew states: “The sons of Jacob (*bnei ya’aqob*). . . .” E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, 265, explains that the sense of “other” is often provided in Hebrew by juxtaposition.

⁵¹ A similar informational broadening occurs in both creation stories. In Genesis 1–2:4a, after a series of creation events in the physical world, on day seven a new theme is introduced, that of rest on the seventh day. In Gen 3:22, in the Adam and Eve story (2:4b–3:24), the reader learns for the first time that eating from that tree would confer immortality and that immortality is a characteristic of celestial beings. God explains that he must banish Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden because if Adam “should take also from the tree of life and eat, [he would] live forever.”

Greek tragedy.⁵² For novels, Torgovnick observes that tangential information affects a reader who may want to learn more about what has been introduced rather than end his reading experience. Novelists may consciously do this in order to give themselves the opportunity to continue the story at some future time.⁵³ For Greek tragedies, specifically those by Sophocles, Deborah Roberts cautions that while a tangential ending may not overpower the closural aspect of an ending, it works against closure.⁵⁴ Allusions to other Greek myths in the final scenes of Sophocles' tragedies cause the audience to withhold making a final judgment on what they have just witnessed. Now *they know*, even though the characters may not, that the end is not really the end. Forces that set the tragedy in motion "continue unabated and they are always part of larger stories."⁵⁵

Dinah never appears again in the narratives of the Pentateuch,⁵⁶ but the two issues crystallized at the end of the Dinah narrative reappear regularly. The theme of Israel's viability despite its small numbers begins in the first patriarchal narratives as their wives have difficulty conceiving. The patriarchs' sense of their relative weakness vis-à-vis the people of the land underlies the treaties between Abraham and Isaac with Abimelekh (Gen 21, 26) and Abraham's purchase of land in which to bury his wife; he is required to "bow low" before the people of the land and pays what appears to be an exorbitant amount of money to accomplish his goal (Gen 23). At the end of Genesis *all* the Israelites who go down to

⁵² Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, 13–14, uses the term "tangential" to describe new information that is introduced in the final section of a novel.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

⁵⁴ Deborah H. Roberts, in "Sophoclean Endings: Another Story," *Arethusa*, 21, 2 (1988): 177–196, describes the presence in Sophocles' final scenes of indirect allusions to a future beyond the action of the play, which would have been known to the audience from the mythical tradition. When these occur in the play's closing scene, "they interfere in some sense with the finality of the ending, and might be called, in Smith's terms, anti-closural." Sometimes the references may remind the audience of misfortune beyond the scope of the plot, 181–182; they may include warnings as well as commands and predictions, 187. She explains that because the characters in the plays are themselves ignorant of what will happen, these references can be considered ironic.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 189, 192.

⁵⁶ Dinah is listed as a daughter of Jacob with Leah in the inventory of family members of Jacob's family who came to Egypt (Gen 46:25). An oblique reference to the actions of the sons is made in Gen 49, the deathbed poem of Jacob, known as the "Testimony of Jacob." Jacob refers to Simeon and Levi as "a pair; their weapons are tools of lawlessness..." (Gen 49:5–7). In that poem Jacob forecasts that they will be divided and scattered in Israel.

Egypt number only seventy (Gen 46:27).⁵⁷ Israel's viability lurks in the background in the stories of Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Manoah in the Book of Judges, and in the histories of Israel in Kings 1 and 2. The second issue, the importance of the moral integrity and honor of Israel and of Israelites, can be seen later in Genesis in the confrontation between Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen 35), in the narrative of Israel at Shittim and Phinehas' reaction there (Num 25:1–18), and in legal codes beginning with the Ten Commandments and continuing through the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22–23:33), the Holiness Code (Lev 17–26), and Deuteronomy. The final scene of Gen 34 expresses these issues as two points of view in a family. The impasse brings the reader to greater understanding about the dilemmas facing Israel (as a small clan and later as a nation) in the Pentateuch.

Despite the impasse and the relatively tangential nature of the information, the reader still has some sense that this story is over. Why is this? Some answers come from Robert Adams, who explained that although in literature “we like to see a problem ‘worked out to the end’” and we even like to see new premises or resolutions for old problems, sometimes there are other ways to consider its wholeness:

The discovery of *impasse* is often a singular experience around which a work that is closed in all other respects may be structured; it may also be [the] cause to reflect interestingly on the qualities of vision and character which are responsible for the impasse. In addition the consequences of impasse may be traced out in opposing directions to two separate finalities or to several or to none at all.⁵⁸ (*italics added*)

The impasse in the final Dinah narrative scene is anti-closural. Two separate understandings of Israel's future are presented, two directions for how it must behave in the future. But this is balanced, in part, by the drama of the story. The interrelationship of its parts brings about an expectation of closure. Adams explains, “The measure of such a work is not its structural unity but its total relevance and intensity.”⁵⁹

The intensity that Adams describes, and the interrelationship between the rape, seduction, negotiation, guile, murder, and mayhem of this story,

⁵⁷ Jacob's words in Gen 34:30, “few in number” (*meṭei mispar*) are echoed in other references to the vulnerability of Israel at that point in its history; see Ps 105:12, 1 Chr 16:19, and Deut 26:5 (*meṭei ma'at*).

⁵⁸ Adams, *Strains of Discord*, 211.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

creates a sense of wholeness.⁶⁰ And, while the final scene focuses on family dissension and does not go beyond impasse, it is not as tangential as it may initially appear.

The final scene builds upon earlier linguistic references to moral issues and to family survival. The theme of values, both positive and negative, is expressed earlier as rape (34:2),⁶¹ “to defile” (*ṭ .m.*) (34:5, 27), “outrage” (*nebalah*) (34:7), “to be uncircumcised” (*‘.r.l.*), and “to be circumcised” (*hiphil* form of *m.w.l.*).⁶² The word “whore” (*zonah*) in the last verse of the narrative (Gen 34:31) collapses the theme of morality into a final metaphor as Simeon and Levi pronounce that pejorative word of condemnation and summarize their innermost fears.⁶³

Jacob’s expressed concern with family survival at the end builds upon thirty-nine words marking family relationships in the narrative.⁶⁴ His initial decision in the story, to refrain from responding to Hamor while his sons are absent, perhaps reflects this concern in a territory where he is a resident alien and his powerful neighbors own the land. His last words underscore *his* primary concern, that the inhabitants could destroy “me and my family” (*ani ubeyti*) (34:30).

One motif that is significant in the earlier parts of the narrative is missing in the final scene, and that reflects the changed mode of how the characters interact. Earlier, the motif of “giving and taking” (*n.t.n* and *l.q.h.*), of flexibility, and of negotiating both honestly and dishonestly arises seventeen times as Hamor and Shechem meet first with Jacob and his sons and then with their own townspeople.⁶⁵ In the final scene there is

⁶⁰ The relevance and intensity of the narrative also fit into the criteria of what Gerald Prince, in *A Grammar of Stories*, 145–152, considers the criteria that mark a “good story.” They include a higher degree of the narrated events than representations of events, concrete depictions of a particular conflict, discrete sequences of time, and wholeness—that is, having a beginning, middle, and end, in which the events are related temporally and causally.

⁶¹ The Hebrew words are, *wayyiqh* ‘*otah wayyiškab* ‘*otah way’annehah*. This is translated in NJPS as “[Shechem] took her and lay with her by force.”

⁶² Forms of “to circumcise” are in Gen 34:14, 15, 17, 22, and 24.

⁶³ The introduction in the end-section of a metaphor or figurative language that is intrinsically connected with prior information in a narrative is a closural device. As discussed in Chapter 4, examples include the word “covenant” (*brit*) in Gen 15, and “she gave [him] drink” (*watašq*) in Gen 21. The latter figuratively ensures the survival of Ishmael and his tribe into the future, as promised by God.

⁶⁴ The thirty-nine words repeated, with prefixes and suffixes, are: daughter, (girl)child, son, father, wife, sister, and children.

⁶⁵ The instances of “taking” (*l.q.h.*) and “giving” (*n.t.n*) are Gen 34:2, 4, 8, 9, 9, 11, 12, 12, 14, 16, 16, 17, 21, 21, 25, 26, 28.

no negotiating, no “give and take.” The positions of Jacob and his sons are rigidly expressed.

It has been argued that this narrative has different sources, and these cause inconsistencies that may affect the ending’s anti-closural final scene. Hermann Gunkel, for example, stated that the ending is loose, indicating sloppy source integration; he found it “unthinkable and without analogy that a story should end with a question.”⁶⁶ More recently Yair Zakovitch compiled a bibliography of attempts to separate original documents in this story; his understanding is that the original story did not include the rape.⁶⁷ Some biblical commentaries attribute the entire narrative to the J-source.⁶⁸ The reader is left facing the same impasse that the author faced: the issue may be unresolvable.

On balance, Gen 34, despite the dramatic anti-closural nature of the final scene, is a “whole” narrative with an ending that is “open” but not overridingly so. When the final scene upsets the stability that should have followed the new equilibrium, other devices balance some of the anti-closure. The honesty (as suggested by Torgovnick) in accepting an impasse (as explained by Adams) in a dramatic and tightly told story produces effective closure. Literary and thematic connections, emphases, and modulations at the end contribute to that closure. The absolute nature of the final words of both Jacob and his sons are another typical ending device that counters the destabilizing final scene in this narrative.⁶⁹

7.6.4. *The Akedah and Its Unspoken Disquietude (Gen 22)*

The instability and openness at the end of the *Akedah* is more nuanced and more problematic due to the narrative’s unsettling inconsistencies

⁶⁶ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, 37f. The Book of Jonah ends as God asks, “And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!”

⁶⁷ Yair Zakovitch, “Assimilation in Biblical Narratives,” in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism*, 185–192, discusses some of the inconsistencies and argues that the original story did not include the rape. He notes that parallels with 2 Sam 13 suggest that the rape was added to legitimize the elimination of Levi and Simeon from leadership of the tribes.

⁶⁸ Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, 88–89; Speiser, *Genesis*, 262; Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 192, notes with an asterisk, per page xxii, that the narrative includes “later additions”; J. Estlin Carpenter, *The Composition of the Pentateuch*, 512, attributes some verses to the P-source.

⁶⁹ Absoluteness, like hyperbole, works against a reader’s questioning the position taken at the end; in that way, it contributes to finality and stability at the end of a narrative. This was discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

(Gen 22:1–19). The narrative is a composite of documentary sources; most scholars agree that much of it is from the E-source, but there is disagreement over specific verses and the identity of the other sources.⁷⁰ Post-biblical writers—with no awareness of documentary sources—have noted these inconsistencies and have built upon them.⁷¹ Modern readers who have knowledge of the source issues and of the rabbinic legends may still feel a sense of unease with the way in which the narrative ends. In Chapter 6 I discussed this narrative, its documentary sources, its structure and structural anomalies, and the transformative nature of the key ritual. Here, after I present a synopsis of the narrative, I examine the reasons for unease at the end of this story.

The well-known narrative tells of God testing Abraham by asking him to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. This destabilizes the equilibrium (22:1–2). It appears that God's promise of descendants to Abraham through Isaac will not be fulfilled. Abraham takes Isaac to the designated remote place and prepares to sacrifice him. He binds his son and takes his knife (22:10). These verses (Gen 22:1–10) are generally attributed to the E-source. As Abraham is about to sacrifice his son an angel of God calls to him and tells him not to harm the boy. A ram appears and Abraham offers it, instead of Isaac, as a sacrifice to God. Isaac will live. Then an angel of God calls to Abraham "a second time" (22:15). These verses in which Abraham's hand is stayed are generally attributed to a redactor (Gen 22:11–15). The last section (22:16–19) is again attributed to the E-source.⁷² God blesses Abraham, noting that Abraham did not withhold

⁷⁰ Most scholars agree that at least the first part of Gen 22, that is, until the angel appears in verse 11, is from the E-source. Gen 22 and its documentary sources and disagreements between scholars about the sources are discussed in Chapter 6, n. 47.

⁷¹ There are many inconsistencies in the *Akedah*, as noted in Chapter 6. The name of God in the story is *Elohim* in verses 1–10; the name *YHWH* is used in the verses in which Isaac's death is prevented (11–15), and also in verse 16 in which the angel quotes God's oath. Verses 11–15 are framed as a separate unit with the words, "An angel of the Lord called to him from heaven," with the exception that the second iteration includes the word[s] "a second time" (*šenit*). It is in these verses that the angel of the Lord appears and prevents the sacrifice of the child. Isaac is never mentioned after Abraham has picked up his knife (22:10) and this non-mention includes Abraham's return from the mountain, where the servants are referred to. The promise of blessings to Abraham in verse 17 is introduced by these words, "Because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son" (22:17). The text does not state what "not withholding" actually entails. It could be that this refers to Abraham's taking the knife in his hand, or perhaps to an actual sacrifice of Isaac, if that occurred in an original E-source version.

⁷² For a fuller discussion of alternative source attributions and a proposed history of the text of Gen 22 see note 82 below.

his son. He promises him uncountable progeny and explains that all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by his descendants,⁷³ that is, they will become the standard by which blessing is invoked.⁷⁴ Then Abraham returns to his servants (whom he and Isaac had left days earlier as they proceeded up the mountain) and they depart for Beersheba, where Abraham remains (22:16–19).

In subsequent patriarchal stories Isaac is alive and well. Nevertheless, in light of proposed source divisions of the text with their compartmentalized information, as well as the framing of verses 11–15, the absence of the writer's mentioning Isaac after verse 10, God's reference to Abraham "not withholding" his son, and the repetition of the phrase "walking/going together" without the word, "the two of them,"⁷⁵ it is possible to see an early version of this story that allowed Isaac to die. Some rabbinic traditions (with no knowledge of source criticism, of course, but with acute awareness of anomalies in a text) have posited that Isaac died and was resuscitated on the altar.⁷⁶

With or without knowledge (or acceptance) of the textual history of this story, when one reads it, the absence of Isaac at the end has a subtle and destabilizing effect. One could wonder why a redactor would bring different versions of the story together but not mention Isaac at least once

⁷³ The Hebrew form of the verb "to bless" in Gen 22:18 is *hitpa'el* and is understood as a reflexive, not a passive. See Harry M. Orlinsky, *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah*, 85, on Gen 12:3, and Sarna, *Genesis*, 89, also on Gen 12:3. In 12:3, where the form of the verb is *niphal*, Sarna notes that the respective contexts where "to bless" is found in *hitpa'el* form (and *pual* form) do not show how it differs from the *hitpa'el*; Sarna's own preference is for a passive translation "shall be blessed through—because of—you." For *hitpa'el* as a passive form, see Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 159 §53.

⁷⁴ The NJPS note *a* on Gen 12:2 points to the end of verse 3, explaining that the blessing of Abraham is "a standard by which blessing is invoked."

⁷⁵ As noted in Chapter 6, a linguistic motif in the E-source that was used twice to describe Abraham and Isaac is repeated at the end with changes. In Gen 22:6 and 8, it is stated twice that Abraham and Isaac walked toward the place of sacrifice: "and they walked, the two of them, together" (*wayyēlku šneiḥem yaḥdaw*). That motif is echoed later, but ominously: the single word for "the two of them (*šneiḥem*)" is missing. Apparently describing just Abraham and his servants, the last verse (22:19a) begins, "Abraham then returned to his servants, and they rose and walked [that is, they departed] together (*wayyaqumu wayyēlku yaḥdaw*) for Beersheba."

⁷⁶ James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 325, notes that "various rabbinic texts bear witness to a tradition that held that Isaac was actually slaughtered and resurrected and hence constituted a biblical instance of resurrection after death. (This motif is based in part on the fact that only Abraham is mentioned as returning after the incident in Gen 22:19)." See also Reuben Firestone, "Merit, Mimesis, and Martyrdom" in AAR 66/1, 93–116, and Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial: On the Legends and Lore of the Command to Abraham to Offer Isaac as a Sacrifice*, 3–8.

after the sacrifice. This is especially troubling because the earlier 'walking together' motif tantalizes the reader.⁷⁷ With conundrums such as these, Walter Crouch suggests two approaches. One is to find answers in other texts, for example, in the various post-biblical traditions, some of which accept Isaac's momentary death. Crouch also suggests that the purpose may be to allow readers to read and re-read and challenge their own pre-conceptions:

A narrative may "close" and still leave a sense of intellectual or emotional incompleteness in the reader that can only be worked out in the reader's extra-textual world.⁷⁸

In the next paragraphs I offer some additional philosophical, theological, and artistic "answers" to the question of why the writer left Isaac's return unmarked and why the Dinah narrative ends with a scene that destabilizes the action.

7.7. *Closure in the Face of Anti-Closure*

Some of the explanations for why some narratives have anti-closural elements that make them appear open-ended have been discussed above. A basic explanation, certainly appropriate for the Dinah narrative, is that some issues are unresolvable, at least in the structure of the text and in the experience of the writer.⁷⁹ The Dinah narrative initially shows that cunning and force can resolve the desire for moral integrity. The final scene raises the terrifying prospect that those actions threaten the family's survival.⁸⁰ Honest evaluation by the author (or editor) indicates that he sees no real conclusion, only an impasse. Yet he constructs his narrative in the midst of this knowledge and it ends with his leaving the issue unresolved. A parallel to this was noted for modern poetry, where B. H. Smith

⁷⁷ One could argue that the non-presence of Isaac is evidence of a figurative or metaphorical end. Of the three patriarchs depicted, Isaac is the least independent or memorable.

⁷⁸ Crouch, *Death and Closure in Biblical Narrative*, 26.

⁷⁹ Stephen Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible*, 142–156, suggests that the impasse should be understood in rhetorical terms, that of the authors expressing hatred for the Canaanites.

⁸⁰ It is possible that the structure of the argument in Gen 34, in which the final word is given to the brothers, reflects the author's predilection. However, the argument and issues continue through the Pentateuch.

finds that "there is a stability of deadlock as well as a stability of repose [and] this compels the reader to draw his own conclusions."⁸¹

The disquieting open-endedness of the Binding of Isaac may simply reflect the layers of tradition and source documents often attributed to it, about which scholars disagree.⁸² One source-based understanding of the ending, presented by Richard Elliott Friedman, suggests that in an early E-source story Abraham sacrificed Isaac.⁸³ Joel Baden proposes that the narrative is E-source, including the patriarchal promises.⁸⁴ The lack of scholarly consensus regarding the sources and the questions raised when one separates the documentary sources lead one to look beyond the sources alone for answers for the instability at the end of the *Akedah*.⁸⁵

Perhaps the *Akedah* reflects a refusal to speak the unspeakable. Smith, in her discussions of the poetry of T. S. Elliot and W. B. Yeats, suggests that the failure to precisely explain may be because "[the poet] does not know what one *should* say . . . What if silence and certitude are equally impossible?" she asks.⁸⁶ The redacted narrative demonstrates the problem when

⁸¹ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 251; Smith sees inconclusiveness as a thematic element in T. S. Elliot's Prufrock poems and in Yeats.

⁸² Joel S. Baden, *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*, 243–247, states that there is "virtual unanimity" among scholars that Gen 22:15–18 are RJE, although Friedman attributes verses 11–15 to RJE and verses 16–18 to the original E narrative. Tzemah L. Yoreh, *The First Book of God*, 22, attributes verses 1–11, 12b, and 19 to the E-source. Also see notes 68 and 69 above, notes 81 and 82 below, and Chapter 6, note 45.

⁸³ Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, 65, suggests that the early E narrative was changed by the redactor [RJE], a reflection of the development of Israelite religion over time. Supporting the presence of that original story, Friedman points out that Isaac does not reappear as a character in E-sources in Genesis. In the next E-source verses (Gen 25:1–4) Abraham takes a wife named Keturah and gives birth to six sons, including one named Midian. The birth of Jacob does not occur in the E-sources as Friedman outlines them, and that is of course one of the problems with this understanding of the sources.

⁸⁴ Baden, *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*, 260, understands that the basic story is E without any interference from either J or P. The use of the divine name YHWH is found elsewhere in the E-source, 235; the patriarchal promises are found in E as well, although with different wording and this version of the wording may have been a late redaction, a redaction that combined separate J, E, and P versions.

⁸⁵ For example, Friedman's approach leads one to ask, where, according to the E-source, did Jacob (and Esau) come from, if Isaac no longer existed? In the P- and J-sources Isaac takes Rebekah as his wife (J in Gen 24:66; P in Gen 25:20). Were the original stories about the patriarchs totally independent of one another?

⁸⁶ B. H. Smith, *Poetic Closure*, 241–250. For modern poetry, the certitude/silence conundrum may reflect the same cultural situation, 242. For some, "desperate skepticism" is an appropriate response when beliefs are crumbling; for others, certitude, such as a "militant fideism," or knowledge based on faith, is appropriate.

a text exhibits *both* silence and certitude. It is certain that Isaac is not sacrificed and it is silent about Isaac's whereabouts after that moment.

Another option—and this supports an artistic interpretation of the ending in which the unease becomes a closural device—is that the not-knowing that the reader notices at the end of the *Akedah* is a subtle reminder of the “not-knowing” that pervades the early part of the narrative: Will Isaac survive? Will Abraham go through with this act? Will God? On the one hand, the reader does “know” that Isaac survives, based on subsequent narratives. But the “not knowing” is subtly repeated at the end. Furthermore, again drawing from Smith's insights, a non-assertive conclusion paradoxically “heighten[s] the apparent significance of everything else.”⁸⁷ When one gets to the end of the *Akedah*, one feels the need to re-read and re-read again to look for hints that explain the ending.

7.8. *Openness as a Function of the Larger Context of the Genesis Narratives*

For both ‘types’ of openness at the ends of narratives—those where the force of anti-closural elements leaves readers with an incomplete sense of closure and those whose ending devices merely blur the actual endpoint—it is possible to suggest that the larger context of these stories may lend itself to anti-closural forces in the endings. It is possible that the writers are keenly aware that their stories are part of a bigger story, which does not have a ‘final act.’ Genesis presents the history of the world from its creation through stories of the earliest families on earth, through the progenitors of the nation Israel. There is interest in the individual, in his experiences, and in the completion of those experiences.

But the history of Israel does not end; it continues beyond the lives and experiences of the heroes and participants in these stories. The events that occur at one moment in time can have repercussions later. Thus Adam and Eve are not discussed again after their initial mention in the Cain and Abel story, but they reappear as the parents of Seth, who is in turn connected with Noah. The information about Ishmael's adult life presented at the end of the Hagar narrative could be compared to a postscript about a long-lost family member. An individual's completion of an event may

⁸⁷ Ibid., 258.

open new doors for the future. The actions of Simeon and Levi in the Dinah story are alluded to in his testament as Jacob is dying (Gen 49). Moreover, when threats appear on the horizon, threats from which there appears to be no way “out,” God comes on the scene and turns things around, as noted above for two wife-sister narratives.⁸⁸ So history continues, although with momentary pauses, as does the story of Israel.

The element of “openness” at the end, however, is not limited to biblical literature. “All great works leave things undone as well as done; all great works have that paradox at the core of their greatness,”⁸⁹ Don Fowler wrote, defending classical literature from the perception that those texts are ‘closed’ works. He shows how the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus* exhibits tension between ending and continuation. In Shakespeare’s tragedies *Hamlet* and *King Lear* the protagonists (and others) die at the end, certainly a closural device, but each has an heir to the throne, insuring the continuation of the kingdom.

⁸⁸ This occurs in the wife-sister narratives in Gen 12 and 20, for example.

⁸⁹ Fowler “First Thoughts on Closure,” 243–245.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

8.1. *Introduction*

The data I have presented here demonstrate the rich trove of closural forms and devices used by biblical authors and editors at the ends of the Genesis narratives. They are found in all the documentary sources and in each and every one of the narratives. A basic conclusion I draw from this is that the authors and editors used closural *conventions*. The question of whether these conventions were used consciously and deliberately or whether they were intuitive can now be addressed. In this final chapter, I also suggest some areas of further study that can enhance the conclusions and questions proffered here.

8.2. *Conclusion*

8.2.1. *Closural Conventions*

All of the narratives in this study end with a key transformation, a new equilibrium, and closural forms that bring the story to a satisfactory close. Most narratives use multiple closural conventions. Each source used them, and the stylistic, informational, and sometimes philosophical differences between the sources did not override the need or instinct to end a narrative with these conventions. They are structural, artistic, and didactic. Cumulatively they lead to levels of stability, finality, and integrity at the end of each story.

The effectiveness of these devices relates to how our minds work to structure experiences and to our experience with life, with biblical narrative, and with other literary genres such as novels and short stories, as I discussed in Chapter 7. The effectiveness of an individual closural device also relates to where in the plot of its narrative the device appears. Sometimes the device will provide the key transformation, but this is relatively rare. More often the devices occur after the transition has taken place, at which point they contribute to the finality or stability or integrity of what

has changed in the narrative. I have noted throughout the book that some of the same types of closural devices appear in other genres.

8.2.2. *Rituals and Etiologies*

A relatively dramatic finding in this study is that rituals and etiologies (and sometimes proverbs) are conventions for closure in these Genesis narratives. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated that etiologies, and often multiple etiologies, are closural devices. They are non-active elements in a narrative and because of that tend to halt the action. Etiologies bring readers beyond the time of the narrative and reconnect them with a time or condition or information closer to their own experiences. This disengages readers from the events of the plot and the characters in the story and helps make clear that the narrative is over. Many etiologies are marked by formulaic language; this helps readers recognize them as closural devices.

Nearly half of the Genesis narratives conclude with a ritual in their end-section, as I discuss in Chapter 6. The rituals are generally briefly described, but they are wide-ranging and include some that are personal interactions with God, others that are part of political treaties, and others that relate to life-cycle events. Each of the Genesis documentary sources has rituals. Many use formulaic language. The rituals are marked by action or by language to indicate that they are important to the characters involved. In the lives of the participants and on the narrative plane that the reader observes, the rituals help re-stabilize situations. Some establish or clarify social hierarchies. Some help 'balance accounts' between individuals or between an individual and God. With the study of rituals I was also able to demonstrate that rituals do *not* contribute to closure when they occur in the narrative *before* the transition in the story. In those cases a ritual may actually destabilize the situation.

A question that occurs with rituals and perhaps with etiologies as well is why they are so prevalent at the ends of narratives. Scholars who have worked in other genres point to a possible answer. In general, information that is presented at the end is easily remembered and this contributes to its didactic effect.¹ Marianna Torgovnick, for example, writes that

¹ In the first two chapters I discussed the importance and didactic role of the end, as presented, among others, by Aristotle (Greek tragedy), Frank Kermode (Western literature in general), Edgar Allen Poe (short stories, and theories of John Gerlach as related to Poe), Barbara Herrnstein Smith (poetry), Marianna Torgovnick (novels), Deborah Roberts

“an ending is the single place where an author most pressingly desires to make his points.”² One can then postulate that the information presented in an etiology and the action described or inferred in a ritual were deemed very important by the author. He wanted his readers to remember the final points he was making. Looked at in this way, the device at the end of the narrative becomes a vehicle to teach.

A second answer to the question of *why* is particularly appropriate for the rituals. Each of the rituals is a process and after the process is completed some things in the story are different in one way or another. The process does not have to precipitate the key transformation in the narrative, but it nonetheless brings about change. We see this, for example, in the life-cycle marriage ritual so laconically described for Isaac and Rebekah at the end of Gen 24, in which Rebekah covers herself with her veil and Isaac brings her into his mother’s tent. The ritual marks the end of the narrative and it also signifies the beginning of a new life for them together. The altars that Abraham builds at the ends of Gen 12 and 13 mark the completion of journeys for him; at the same time they confirm an ongoing relationship between Abraham and God. Looked at in this way, the rituals have a dual function. They close one phase and open a door into the future, to a place that the author is leading his readers.

A third possibility relates more to the etiologies. Since they are descriptive and have no related activity, they emphatically stop the forward movement of a narrative.

8.2.3. *Repetition and Other Linguistic Devices*

Some of the closural devices I have examined have already been noted by biblical scholars in the past as occurring at the ends of narratives. These include framing, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, and the use of motifs of departing or remaining someplace, the motif of death, and some specific language related to these motifs, discussed in Chapter 4. In that chapter, I also showed how the words “to return” (*š.w.b*) and “to remain” (*y.š.b*) are part of a larger category of ending devices, that is, natural stopping points. In addition to departures and remaining in a place, other natural stopping

(Sophocles, Euripides, and other Greek playwrights), Gerald Prince (narrative), William Labov (vernacular narratives), and David Richter (rhetorical fiction). In the area of Bible, I noted the contributions of Jeffrey H. Tigay (didactic closing verses of Deuteronomy) and Aharon Mirsky (linguistic changes). The observations of Isaac B. Gottlieb on the ends of biblical books provided a foundation for several discussions in Chapter 2.

² Marianna Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel*, 19.

points such as death and the conclusion of an event use specific words, and these mark the end of a narrative.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated how repetition can be closural. Repetition can make an earlier statement or occurrence appear more real, adding a stabilizing effect at a story's end. God's promise to never again destroy the earth is reassuring at the end of the J-source Flood story; when it is repeated a second time the reassurance is stabilizing. When Abraham builds *two* altars at the end of Gen 12:9, it emphasizes his loyalty to God. Repetitions of key words and motifs in end-sections are especially powerful markers of the end when subtle changes in their use support the new equilibrium of their stories. In Gen 2–3 the positive sense of the noun "earth/soil," *adamah* shifts to a negative sense, aligned with the change from the positive role of the soil from which Adam was formed to its negative sense as the source of his future toil, his ongoing punishment. Similarly in Gen 23 the verb *q.w.m* first is applied to people "getting up" and in the end-section connects to the key transformation in the narrative; *q.w.m* becomes an existential description of the land itself having passed to Abraham's ownership.

Poetic repetitions at the end of a prose narrative are closural in various ways. Their change in style alerts readers that the writer may have completed what he wanted to say in prose. The poetry may repeat concepts stated in prose, adding finality to a close (as noted for the J-source Flood), and the poetry itself uses repetition as an organizing feature. I discussed these points in Chapter 3, where I showed how linguistic repetitions in poetic endings contribute to closure. In the P-source Flood narrative, for example, repetitions of the Hebrew words *'akh* and *miyyad* structure the ending of this subsection (Gen 9:4–5, 6). The blessing and cursing section at end of a Noah narrative repeats words and concepts using an A-B-C, A¹-B¹-C¹, D-D¹-E-C² structure (Gen 9:25–27). The third repetition of the "C-word" (*'ebed*, "slave") emphatically drives home the point of the narrative.

I also showed that a frame, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, is a formal structure of repetition and is closural in these narratives. When a theme or specific language that was stated at the beginning is repeated at the end it reminds readers that the author is returning to the point from which he started; the author has defined a unit. An arrival at the beginning coupled with a departure at the end is a thematic frame. In the Tower of Babel narrative, the people on earth migrate from the east to a valley in Shinar; at the end they leave, scattering over the face of the earth (Gen 11:1–9).

Sarah and Abraham go down from Canaan to Egypt, where they encounter the Pharaoh, and at the end of the narrative they depart (Gen 12:10–20). Linguistic frames also define a unit. At the beginning and at the end of the E-source version of Jacob at Bethel (Gen 35:1–8), the words “build,” “altar,” “there,” “flee” are repeated. In verse 1 God tells Jacob to “*build an altar there* to the God who appeared to you when *you were fleeing from your brother Esau*.” At the end the narrator explains that “*There he built an altar* and named the site El-Bethel, for it was there that God had revealed Himself to him *when he was fleeing from his brother*.”

Summaries, and sometimes two summaries, recapitulate what has occurred in the story, as discussed in Chapter 4. Many summaries focus on the transformative change in the narrative, generalizing the significance of the new equilibrium. Summaries signal to readers that the writer has completed his narrative. The narrator in Gen 2:4a states, “Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.” There are also summary statements at the ends of the P-source Flood story (Gen 9); the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:9); God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 15); Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19); Abraham’s purchase of a burial site (Gen 23); and Jacob’s acquisition of the birthright (Gen 25). When biblical writers used the summaries to impress didactic points upon their readers they may have assumed that the last items stated would be remembered best. The narrator of Gen 25 wants his readers to be absolutely clear that it was *Esau who spurned the birthright* and that is why Jacob gained it.

Occasionally different documentary sources each provide a summary. The discussion in Chapter 4 of two summaries at the end of the P-source creation story and at the end of the Sodom and Gomorrah story demonstrate that different documentary sources emphasized different aspects of the story (Gen 1:1–2:4a; Gen 18:16–19:29). The presence of two summaries also demonstrates that the redactor chose to include both.

Other linguistic devices discussed in Chapter 4 include changes in narrative style or tone and the use of certain words that demand the attention of readers. These call attention to themselves, making readers aware of the reading process in which they are engaged. The devices allow readers the opportunity to reflect on what has occurred and consider, especially if the transformation has occurred, whether the narrative might be over. At the end of the J-source Flood story the narrative style changes from prose to poetry (Gen 8:20–22). After Abraham purchases a burial site for his wife the style changes from spoken discourse to a legalistic summary (Gen 23). Specific authoritative words that are a sign of definitiveness

suggest closure. In the Cain and Abel story God uses the term *lakhen* in the end-section as he moderates the punishment of Cain (Gen 4:15). *Lakhen* is used elsewhere as a concluding term to introduce a vow.

Hyperbole and absolute words are used sparingly but create a strong impression of the unassailable finality of a situation. The absolute assertion that people were scattered over *all* the earth in the Tower of Babel story or the doubled hyperbole in the *Akedah*, that Abraham's descendants would be numerous as stars of the sky *and* the sands on the seashore, leave the reader realizing that the author has stated the "last word" on the subject.

8.2.4. *Methodology*

The methodology I have employed has proven very satisfactory. As I explained in Chapter 2, the identification of an end-section compensates for the lack of physical marks of ending that one finds in poetry, novels, short stories, and drama. The Kafalenos paradigm I have used is a structural approach that has built upon, and then refined, the work of generations of scholars.³ The method is effective for this study because it isolates the transformative moment of each narrative within a standardized structure. As a result, I have been able to identify most "end-sections" with confidence. This was a prerequisite for my own close reading of the texts and for the secondary readings I used. Close reading, along with awareness of the relatedness of the narratives, allows the artistic components of each narrative and each end-section to shine through.

8.3. *Narrative Poetics and Historical Criticism*

Discussions about narratives that have more than one source have shown the benefits of using documentary criticism together with narrative poetics. The study has provided a helpful connection between the two. From a source critical point of view, the awareness of closural conventions reaffirms source components of some stories. From the point of view of the poetics of narrative endings, the closural conventions clarify how the presence of other sources can make subtle changes at the end.

At the end of the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative, for example, the presence of a P-source ending to the J-source narrative shifts the focus

³ Emma Kafalenos, *Narrative Causalities*.

of the reader from the righteousness of Lot to God's choice of Abraham.⁴ The narrative that includes Jacob's dream (Gen 28) is a mixture of J- and E-sources, but the editor chose to end his narrative with a ritual, which was in the E-source.⁵ The brief insertion of P-source verses into an otherwise all J-source narrative affects the subsequent narrative: the mention of Abraham's wealth in Gen 12:4–5 seems to lessen the benefits that Abraham received from the Pharaoh at the end of Gen 13 (which is another J-source narrative).⁶ Another benefit that the combined use of poetics and critical reading brings about is to make clear where the lines of separation are between two narratives. Gen 27:1–45 and Gen 27:46–28 overlap in terms of their issues (Jacob's blessing and departure) and their characters (Isaac, Esau, Jacob, Rebekah). Yet their closural conventions clarify the separation and as one example it illuminates the P-source's concern with endogamous marriage.⁷

8.4. *The Question of Intentional Use of Conventions and Closural Devices*

Were biblical writers aware of the conventions and closural devices that they used when they completed their stories? Did they use them deliberately? I raised this issue in my initial discussion in this book and referred to it again after the discussion in Chapter 1 of closural devices in the Cain and Abel story (Gen 4). The data suggest that it is likely that the basic element of closure in a narrative, that is, the resolution of the defined instability into a new equilibrium, is an instinctive quality in all storytelling. It is observable in every single one of the Genesis narratives and can be found in stories told by young children, in oral and written narrative, and in all societies.

Beyond this first observation, it is, of course, impossible to state definitively that a particular writer was deliberately "being closural" when he related that Abraham "built an altar," or that the writer was deliberately changing the nuanced meaning of the word "earth (*adamah*)" from positive to negative in the Adam and Eve story, or that naming the town that Cain settled in "Nod" (*n.w.d*, from the verb "to wander") was intentional.

⁴ Section 4.2.2.

⁵ Section 6.4 and n. 39.

⁶ Section 2.5.2.

⁷ Section 3.5.3

It is apparent that some types of conventions were followed for ending a narrative. Eighteen of the narratives close with one or more rituals; twenty of the narratives close with one or more etiologies. The tendency toward ritual endings is even observable in narratives in which documentary sources were combined, suggesting that the redactor also chose to end a narrative with a ritualized action. In Gen 28:10–22, a combination of E- and J-sources, the E-source ritual in which Jacob raises a pillar to God, anoints it, and makes a vow concludes the end-section. The preponderance of rituals at the ends of narratives seems to suggest a narrative convention, an understanding that “this was what one did at the end of a narrative.”

Some motifs seem to recur with such regularity that it would appear that writers who used them were utilizing standard motifs and could easily have been aware of these. The most common is the characters’ departure from the scene or the death of a protagonist (the latter used sparingly in these narratives). Another satisfactory way to end a narrative was to describe an iterative process, an action that is ongoing but one for which no differentiating details are given. This is noticeable in Gen 12:1–9, in which Abraham continues to move about in Canaan, in Gen 21:22–34 in which Abraham continues residing in the land, and in Gen 24, in which Isaac finds comfort in Rebekah after his mother’s death. Etiologies that “explain” people’s ongoing behavior function in a similar manner: why husbands and wives “cling” to one another (Gen 2:24); why people need to work (Gen 3:17–19); why the children of Israel do not eat the meat of the thigh muscle (Gen 32:33). These are ongoing actions but no differentiating characteristics are noted.

Other devices are more subtle, and it is more difficult to come to a conclusion about whether they were used with deliberation. I can imagine, however, that a good storyteller/writer would find delight in playing with tone, style, and words. He would use modifications to point out changes that were brought about in the narrative and to emphasize what he considered important. The delight that the J-source has in playing with language is well known.⁸ The example of the Cain and Abel story, with the choice of a place-name that would forever remind Cain, and readers, that he had suffered the punishment of “wandering,” suggests that the writer

⁸ “In calling J a prose poet, I mean something like a prose Shakespeare, because J’s narratives have a Shakespearean exuberance of invention, and her language brims with ceaseless wordplay, as does Shakespeare’s,” writes Harold Bloom, *The Book of J*, 319–320. See also Speiser, *Genesis*, xxvi–xxix.

knew exactly what he was doing. This device is evident in the P-source as well. As noted above, wordplay is a closural factor when Abraham purchases a site in which to bury his wife (Gen 23). The final authoritative verses re-use the verb (*q.w.m*), which earlier simply expressed the idea “to get up,” to existentially indicate the changed status of the land: it now belongs to Abraham. An example in the E-source may be less convincing because of issues of textual transmission, but at the end of the *Akedah*, the chilling repetition of the phrase “and they walked, the two of them, together” (*wayyelku šneihem yahdaw*)—without the word “the two of them” (*šneihem*)—suggests that the author, or editor, intended to support a new equilibrium while at the same time reminding his readers of the process over time that had brought both the characters and readers to that moment.

8.5. *Further Study*

It will be interesting and valuable to look beyond these short narratives in Genesis to longer narratives and to stories in other books of the Bible. The sagas of Jacob, Joseph, and King David, which are composed of closely related narratives that follow the lives of one character might exhibit similar characteristics in their end-sections. Isaac Gottlieb’s work on endings of biblical books could be expanded to include some of the closural devices I have identified in short narratives in Genesis.⁹ For example, a summary, an absolute statement, and a six-time repetition of the absolute word “all” (*kol*) are observable in the last verses of Deuteronomy (34:10–12).¹⁰ The absolute statement is that “*never again* did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses.” The summary states that Moses was singled out by God, who spoke to him directly, to show to the Pharaoh and all Egypt all the signs that God sent, and Moses displayed this awesome power before “*all Israel*.” As this example of the end of Deuteronomy indicates, analyses of larger biblical units could prove worthwhile. And, while this study focuses on the stabilizing elements at the ends of the narratives, a broad study of anti-closure across many books of the Bible may yield

⁹ Isaac B. Gottlieb, “*Sof Davar: Biblical Endings*” in *Prooftexts*, 1991 v. 11, 213–224.

¹⁰ Deut 34:10–12 includes the words, “*all* the signs and portents...*all* the servants [of Pharaoh] and *all* his land...*all* the great might and *all* the awesome power that Moses displayed before *all Israel*.”

additional insights into the purposes behind this tendency. In Chapter 7, I discussed anti-closural elements in the Genesis narratives.

An early thought, which I discarded because it would have diluted the concentration of this study, was to compare these Genesis narratives to the extant narratives of Egypt and Mesopotamia, cultures that have historical and cultural connections with ancient Israel. Stephanie Dalley, writing about the Akkadian myth Gilgamesh, observes that the words near the end adapt the opening lines of this myth and form an epilogue: "Go up on the wall of Uruk, Ur-shanabi, and walk around." This suggests, too, that the words are a frame around the story.¹¹

It is hoped that the methodology developed for the analysis of the ends of biblical narratives, the extension of narrative poetics into the area of historical criticism, and the conclusion that there were closural conventions in the narratives will be the basis for further insights into the artistry and purposes of these stories.

¹¹ Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 120, Tablet XI, §vi; her comments are in the notes, p. 134, n. 146.

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